STORY of OSWALD PAGE

A BOY FROM ARIZONA

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THE STORY OF OSWALD PAGE

CHAPTER I

NEWS.

"HAVE you heard the news, Tom?"

"News! You don't mean to tell me there's real news? Dear old Calixtus has been so quiet of late, I'm sure the word 'news' has been dropped from the dictionary."

"Well, there is real news. And I know it!"

"Out with it, man! This suspense is tragic!"

"Oh, what's your hurry? It won't happen for ten minutes yet, because I heard the whistle only a little while ago."

"The whistle? Billy Webb, I give you fair and timely warning—if you've got real news, tell it to me! I'm starving for something to happen. None of your mysterious winks, now! Out with it—or suffer the consequences."

"You needn't think you can scare me, Tom Palmer! When I've got news to tell, I charge a good price for it——"

The boy did not finish his sentence; Tom Palmer, feigning an anger he did not feel—for the boys were bosom friends, and Webb an inveterate tease—grasped the latter in an iron embrace and soon sat astride him upon the ground, threatening him with closed fists.

"Now," the conqueror laughed, "tell me the news! I'm desperate."

"Let me up, Mr. Bandit, and I'll tell you. I can't hold it much longer anyway."

Palmer liberated his captive. With an air of importance the smaller boy arose to his feet, and spoke, weighing each word of his astonishing assertion.

"We're going—to have—a new—student! And he is—coming—this afternoon! I heard Father Royce—talking over the telephone—this morning! And he said—he would go—to this afternoon's train—to meet HIM!"

"Bully, bully!" shouted Tom. He danced a caper on the grass and threw his friend's cap in the air. "What's he like?"

"Like?" laughed Webb. "One of the breakable kind—handle with care, you know! blue eyes, flaxen hair, parted in the middle, sweet, winning smile and a voice to match, tender——"

"Oh, hold on, Webb! What are you trying to palm off now?"

"I'm not trying to palm off anything—you're the only Palmer around here."

"Very clevah, indeed! Do you know the new student?"

"Not exactly," said Webb, somewhat less confidently, "but I overheard what Father Royce said over the telephone. I didn't want to listen, but he had me in his room to recite the memory lines old 'Baldy' gave me for bringing the mouse into class yesterday. So I just couldn't help overhearing what he said to the new boy's mother."

"Well, he didn't say he had blue eyes and flaxen hair and——"

"Oh, no, he didn't say that, but he did say, 'Oh, yes, Mrs. Page, we'll take good care of Oswald, and I'm sure the boys won't be too rough with him. Indeed, many of our boys are fresh from motherly surroundings, so have no fear! Your son will be cared for quite to your liking.'"

When Billy, who had tried to imitate a woman's voice, finished his speech, he solemnly bared his wrist with his other hand, and gave it a gentle slap, adding: "There, now, Oswald Page! Take that and be a better boy or I'll have to ask mother to chastise you."

"Perhaps it isn't quite as bad as you imagine, Billy. Let us hope for the best. We'd never get along with that kind of a boy here. I wonder who'll be 'can-opener.' I wouldn't want the job if he's that kind of a boy."

"But you'll get it, all the same, you see if you don't. Look, there comes old Nellie over the hill now. Father Royce is driving and the new boy is with him. Soon we shall know the worst."

"And in the meantime we'll hope for the best," added Tom.

A word of introduction to our new friends and surroundings may well be listened to now while the old horse is slowly climbing the hill under the gentle rein of Father Royce.

Both the boys were about the same age—not over fourteen—but William Webb was much smaller than his friend. He was, however, far from being under-size, and his strong chest and arms showed a fine development in strength and muscle. His dark eyes, hidden under heavy black eyelashes, and his round, olive-colored face, gave him an expression of shrewdness. Judging from his many pranks and escapades at Calixtus Academy, this expression did not belie the facts. William's one source of trouble was his hair—it was as black as coal, as straight as straw, and never combed. The famous debate held at last year's minstrel show had been on the subject, "Resolved: That Billy Webb part his hair in the middle." Billy, of course, was incensed, but he was somewhat mollified at the decision of the judges, who awarded the victory to the negative, which side conclusively proved that the young man in question never parted his hair at all.

Thomas Palmer was taller than William, and of military bearing. He was a manly, good-humored, even-tempered lad, a recognized leader in all the athletic sports of the Academy, and yet a leader, too, in his studies. Whatever Tom Palmer determined to do was well and thoroughly done. In consequence, he enjoyed the esteem of both students and professors. His love of fun

and his unassuming manner in constant athletic victories, endeared him to his companions; his serious regard for studies was recognized by his superiors as a splendid example for other less ambitious youngsters.

The school in which we find our two friends was known as the Calixtus Academy, a military training school, fitting youth for college work and for West Point entrance examinations. For the most part the boys of wealthy parents composed the student body, which, at the time of our story, numbered less than one hundred. Father Royce, a lovable old priest despite his stern demand for the best that is in a boy, was assisted by several laymen, all carrying enviable degrees gained by hard work in the noted universities of the country.

The Academy was situated in a quiet little valley in the South, some thirty miles from Richmond. The grounds were large, and were filled with attractions that appeal to all boys—well cut baseball diamonds, large hand-ball alleys, tennis courts, and a large artificial lake. Within the gymnasium were indoor arrangements for winter sports. Before the main building lay a large stretch of level ground, upon which the boys were put through strict military drill by a United States army officer. Thus the athletic and military training, combined with the wholesome moral and intellectual curriculum of the school, tended to produce fine manly specimens of Americans. Calixtus Academy was indeed a suitable

training quarters for the sterner life at West Point.

* * *

Our two friends stood watching the old horse labor slowly up Academy Hill. Each in his mind was drawing mental pictures of the new student, and hoping that he would be a valuable and friendly addition to their slender ranks.

To have a new student arrive so late in November was an almost unheard-of occurrence, so many other boys soon gathered around and listended to the explanation of William Webb. Be it said to the boy's credit, he omitted, in this general account, his misgivings concerning the character of Oswald Page, leaving the youth "a clear field to make good," as he charitably expressed it to Tom Palmer, from whom he kept no secrets.

The carriage bearing Father Royce and the boy at last reached the gate. The good priest greeted the loiterers in affectionate terms, and as he saw Palmer among them, he called: "Master Palmer, come to my room in about ten minutes, please."

"Yes, Father," answered Tom, but with a heavy heart and a significant glance at William. The glance was answered by a look which plainly said "I told you so." Both had caught a glimpse of the frail little chap huddled up close to Father Royce. His face was quite colorless, but the features were perfectly formed; his eyes were light blue, and extremely large; his hair, for a few stray wisps peeped out from his pretty little cap, was not flaxen—it was gold, and curly, and

long. Both boys looked, and in that fleeting glance they felt their worst fears were realized.

"And I've got to be can-opener for a girl," sighed Tom.

"Isn't she a pretty little thing?" whispered William as he passed, "and you're to be can-opener."

"Say, Bill, don't rub it in!"

Tom brushed the dust off his shoes and prepared to face Father Royce—to receive from him, he knew, the duty of introducing the newcomer to the boys, and to be in a measure his protector and guide, until he felt able to take care of himself, which was generally as soon as the first strangeness was worn off. This duty was called "can-opening," a name expressive to any graduate of Calixtus Academy. Tom in this particular instance felt like a martyr, and it was with misgiving that he knocked on the president's door. As he waited for a response, he could hear, through the partly opened door, the new boy talking to Father Royce, and the voice was indeed like that of a girl.

"Well," thought our friend, "whatever Tom Palmer attempts to do, he does it the best he knows how. I'm not going to show the white feather this time."

And the struggle was over.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTIONS.

"COME in, Master Palmer." A pleasant smile played about the lips of Father Royce as he looked into the bright eyes of the boy who promptly entered. The good priest had chosen well in this particular case, for he felt that Oswald Page would need just such a friend.

"Tom"—the president was grave—"this is Master Oswald Page; Master Page, this is Tom Palmer, one of your new friends."

The eyes of the two boys met for a moment as they shook hands, but neither spoke. The trembling hand of Oswald was almost crushed in the hearty palm of his new friend, but the little fellow returned the grip manfully and did not wince, as Tom secretly thought he would. On the contrary, he met his glance squarely, and seemed to guess the thought in Tom's mind, for he smiled, and his eyes snapped with interest.

"Now, Tom," resumed the president, "I place Oswald in your charge until he becomes accustomed to his new surroundings. As you may have judged, he is not accustomed to our informal ways, and he is apt to feel a little strange at first; so I feel as though I have put him in good hands."

Father Royce was more earnest than usual, although this was his customary form of appointing

a "can-opener." (By the way, Father Royce did not recognize this expression as the official title of the youths upon whom he placed this particular duty.)

Tom's candid eyes met the gaze of his superior as he replied, "I promise to do my duty, Father, and [half turning to the silent boy beside him] I trust Oswald and I will become friends."

"God bless you, children! Now run along. Tom will tell you what rules you are to remember and observe, my son."

The two passed out in silence. Tom could not repress a sigh as he glanced at the trim figure beside him. The boy's hat was off, and his golden hair could be seen to advantage. It was indeed beautiful, but about three inches too long, thought Tom. A stray curl hung down over the lad's forehead as though to call attention to his large, lustrous eyes of blue, which were now turned towards Tom and were wide with open admiration. Those large eyes were indeed prominent, because, perhaps, they formed such a striking contrast to his thin, colorless cheeks. Oswald was slight in form, but dressed immaculately. Despite the day's travel, his collar was unspotted; his neat, light suit seemed just to have left the tailor's. Even his shoes, that most forgotten and treacherous of boy's dress, were nicely polished and of the latest make. Tom noticed all this at a glance, and his thoughts flew back to the telephone message as related by Webb. Once again he sighed.

And yet he felt he was going to like Oswald Page. Perhaps, after all, his duty would be more pleasant than he had hoped. Whereupon, he silently made up his mind to begin right, by licking the first boy who teased his charge.

"Well," Tom folded his arms and smiled at the boy, "we may as well get acquainted, you and I, before we face the orchestra."

"The orchestra?" gasped Oswald, and his high soprano voice was remarkably sweet. "Is there an orchestra here? I'm so glad! I love music!"

Tom's hearty laugh pealed out. "No, I don't mean real music—although some of the boys can play pretty good. When I say 'orchestra,' that's slang for 'the bunch of fellows.' You know there are a hundred of us, so it will take you a day or so to get fully acquainted."

"Are there only a hundred boys? Why, I was told there were several hundred. Do you know, even a hundred means more to me than to most boys, for in the town I used to live in when I was a little fellow [Tom mentally wondered what he considered himself now] there were only eighteen boys altogether."

"Only eighteen in the whole town! Flaming jack-knives! That was only enough for a ball game without an umpire. I thought you were from Boston?"

"What made you think that? No, indeed, not Boston. I was born out in the wilds of Arizona, in Bear Gulch."

"What's that? Say, spring that gag again,

will you? I guess I didn't hear you straight, I missed fire then, I——" But Tom checked himself. He felt sure his friend would be shocked at such talk. And yet in all the moving pictures he had ever seen, he never remembered a type like Oswald Page claiming the Wild West as his native haunt.

Oswald laughed, a merry peal of laughter that made the old building re-echo.

"Oh, you're the funniest boy I ever met. I do hope, Master Palmer, that all the boys are as nice as you."

Master Palmer! Tom started as though a bullet had hit him. Was the like ever heard among boys? *Master,* indeed! He had a retort half uttered, but he checked it and bit his lip in time to save himself. After a pause he said:

"Well, Oswald, I just can't stand that 'master' business. Call me 'Tom'—that's my name—and I'd give anything if you had some other name to be known by than 'Oswald'—it sounds so—so—" He broke off in despair, fearing he would offend his new friend.

"I'm sorry you don't like my name, Tom. Perhaps you'd prefer to call me by the name the boys at Bear Gulch gave me, though it was a most ridiculous name."

"Sure thing I would! Let's have it! I do believe, after all, we'll get along first rate."

Tom was quite excited over a nickname to take the place of the gentle-sounding "Oswald"—any-

thing at all would do to present to the crowd. "What's the name?"

"The Terror," came the modest answer.

Tom laughed loud and long, and when he met the anxious look of the sweet, innocent "Terror," he laughed louder and longer than ever. He found his voice at last and managed to say to the astonished "Terror," "I guess you'd better leave that name in Arizona. It'd never do here. We'll have to stick to 'Oswald.' "

"I thought it wouldn't do. I won't mention it if you think it best not to. Besides, mother never did like to hear anyone call me that name. But you know you can call me 'Page.' "

"That's manfully put," returned Tom. "We'll turn over a new leaf right now, and you'll be 'Page.' "

"Oh, but you are funny! I begin to think I'm going to like the Academy. I do hope all the boys are like you. But, Tom, before we get out in the yard with the others let me tell you a secret."

Oswald was serious now, and he stopped and folded his arms. Tom, who was about to open the door into the recreation grounds, turned away, and prepared to hear what this strange little chap had to say. "I want to tell you before I meet the other boys, for perhaps you can help me. *I never played with boys in all my life.* I'll tell you why some time, but not now. I know I haven't just the ways of most boys, and at present I'm not strong enough to get into ath-

letics, for I've been pretty sick. The others will laugh at me sometimes when I do something exceptionally ridiculous, but I won't mind, for the more they laugh, the quicker I'll see my mistakes and learn to be a real boy; and I'm going to learn, too. You can't understand how it is, Tom, but it's pretty hard on me, and the first few weeks are going to be difficult; but I'll learn to be a boy if I have to be licked by every boy in the school!"

Oswald's voice was raised in emphatic resolve, and his eyes snapped fire.

Tom was taken completely off his guard, and could only stare in open-mouthed astonishment. Here was a new specimen of manhood, a kind he had never met before; he was puzzled, although he could see beyond the speaker's words into the manly spirit that prompted them—and so he admired. This honest, candid avowal of a point about which boys are rather sensitive, went right to Tom's heart. From that very moment Tom Palmer ceased to be the official "can opener"—he became the staunch friend. When he finally found his voice, he said with outstretched hand:

"No, Page, I don't quite understand—but all the same, we'll shake hands on it. You and I are going to be friends, and if there's any fighting to be done, just call on me."

"Thanks, Tom, I thought you'd look at it that way. What I want you to do principally is to help me overcome my foolish ways, and be like the rest of the fellows. Don't be afraid to offend

me by what you say, for I promise to listen. As for the fighting—well, there won't be any, or if there is, I'll get along. A licking or two might help me, you know."

"I guess you've got some of that Arizona stuff in you, after all!" Tom complimented.

The two now entered the recreation grounds and soon found themselves surrounded by an eager crowd of boys, ready and willing to welcome the newcomer, and to size up his qualities.

William Webb was somewhat in advance of the others, and was accordingly honored by Tom with an introduction. Oswald received the introduction in the most formal manner; bowed and politely informed the young man that he was quite pleased to know him.

"The pleasure is mine," replied Webb, flourishing his dusty cap and bowing in mock gravity. "My only regret, dear friend, is that you find me in such unbecoming attire."

This speech was received with a hearty outburst of laughter, and Oswald's treble could be heard above the others.

"You are all so funny," was the compliment.

Significant winks were passed from one boy to another, expressions such as "The dear little fellow!" "Mother's darling," etc., could be heard, but the frown on Tom's face soon checked any desire on the part of the boys to express their opinions.

Although Oswald was quick to notice all these significant signs, his pleasant conversation and

his hearty laughter were unabated. Tom was not deceived, however, for he saw the blush that mantled the boy's brow, and he knew his pride had already received its first blow. His admiration for Oswald grew steadily.

It was less than half an hour before Master Webb found, to his surprise, that he had met a match in the gentle boy before him, for Oswald was not slow to "get back at" Webb, as the boys expressed it.

"You say your name is Webb?" innocently asked Page.

"Yes, dearest—Billy Webb," the boy answered.

"Why 'Billy' instead of 'William'?" asked Oswald, and his large eyes were still innocent.

"Because, sir, we 'little gentlemen' of this Academy are not particularly averse to abbreviated names or nicknames." This was supposed to be ironical.

"Oh, I'm glad of that," came the quick answer, "for I'd about made up my mind to give you a nickname."

"What's the name? What's the name?" came in a chorus from all the boys, and "What's the name?" came from Webb.

"I thought you might like to be called 'Spider.' It would hang so nicely to your Webb, you know!"

"Hurrah!" cried out the crowd of boys. " 'Spider' is good! 'Spider' Webb."

Thus came the new name, and it raised Oswald several points in the estimation of all who had

heard it. Needless to say, the name stuck close and became the common address of our friend William.

Further conversation was now forbidden by the bell, which marked the close of recreation. Each boy ran off to the special duties assigned to him. A few hurried instructions from Tom were sufficient, and Oswald was as busy as the others. The sun had sunk low in the heavens, evening came on quickly. At the supper table Oswald sat beside Tom, who, realizing that the little fellow was on the verge of the first feelings of homesickness, kept up a continual conversation. Tom was surprised at the supper Oswald ate, and when he made some remark about not eating enough to keep a bird alive, the little chap made excuse that he was only just getting over a long sickness, and so his usual hearty appetite had not yet returned.

From supper time on Oswald was unable to see Tom, for that youngster was industriously preparing the morrow's lessons. It was a trying evening for the new boy. He spent the most enjoyable part of it in the pretty little chapel, offering to our dear Lord his new life in the Academy, and begging the divine blessing. When, after night prayers, said together in the chapel, each boy trotted off to his own bed, Oswald once more found himself placed near Tom.

"Cheer up, Page; don't be blue now, but get to sleep as quick as you can. Tomorrow you won't have time to be homesick."

A silvery tear was the boy's only answer. He tried to hide the heavy feeling, but could not quite succeed. It was a new experience to spend a night away from his mother. He clutched his rosary and tossed about restlessly.

What college boy has not at one time or another experienced that first feeling of homesickness? One may be rough and rugged, refined and gentle —it matters not. The darkness of the night will recall the pleasant home; the sweet "good-night" of a loving mother will ring in one's ears, seeming as necessary to a peaceful night's sleep as the prayers said at one's bedside. For a boy like Oswald Page, gentle, affectionate, loving, it was especially hard, and he lay long before the gentle hand of sleep closed his eyes on this first night at Calixtus Academy.

CHAPTER III

THE SONG OF THE ORIOLE.

"WELL, what do you think of our new student?" asked Tom, as he and Webb prepared for the morning drill.

"He's a mollycoddle, and should never have been permitted to leave his mother's apron strings!"

"You're a bit prejudiced against him, because he put one over you yesterday, Spider. I guess you may as well become accustomed to the sound of your new name. You've something to thank the mollycoddle for, anyway."

"Perhaps I have," replied Webb. Plainly he was in an ill humor. "Just let him give me half a chance, and I'll hang something on him that might last as long and look just as ugly as my 'Spider'! I, for one, am not in love with him."

"Billy, you're making one of your foolish, hasty judgments now. You'll live to see the day that you'll love Oswald Page, I can guarantee that. But until that day comes, you'll have to reckon with me before you do him any harm. I'm going to stick up for that boy until his true mettle is known. Then he'll be able to take care of himself."

"If he lives that long!" answered his companion. "I know you've been handed the job of looking after him for a while, Tom, and I know

you always do whatever you are given to do in the proper way. But a can-opener can't be a steady job. He's bound to fight his own battles the same as the rest of us."

"Perhaps he can do that better than you think. He's spunky enough."

Tom was serious, for he liked William Webb, and he felt it necessary to gain him as an ally in the battle he felt must be fought before Oswald Page won out.

"You mean to say that baby could fight? Why, Tom, I'm willing to have my suspenders wound around my feet, and my belt strapping both my hands behind me, and even then, I'd guarantee to lick Oswald Page!"

William had raised his voice at this astonishing assertion, and Oswald, who was hurrying along behind them, could not but hear it. Quickly stooping to the ground he picked up a small piece of wood, and with a laugh, ran toward the two boys.

"Quick, Spider, quick!" he cried as he rushed up to him.

"What's the matter?" asked Webb, rather disconcerted at seeing the object of his unflattering remarks within hearing distance.

"Matter enough!" cried Oswald in feigned excitement, "there's a chip on my shoulder and I want some one to knock it off. But it means fight, you know!"

Oswald looked so innocent, he laughed so pleasantly, he showed so clearly that, although he had

heard the uncharitable remark, he was not offended, that even Webb joined in the general laugh that followed and felt actually ashamed.

"I say, Tom," asked Oswald, in order to make the blushing Webb feel more at ease, "can you give me some hints as to this drill business? I never saw a soldier's uniform in my life, so you can imagine I'm not a very good one myself (soldier, I mean, not uniform)."

"Oh, it will be simple enough. Major Bray will not be hard on you yet a while, for he knows you're a new recruit. Just remember your right foot from your left, and for everything else follow the boy in front of you, and you'll get by."

"We never had anything like that in Bear Gulch," complained Oswald.

"Where?" asked William quickly.

"Out where I used to live in Arizona. Didn't you know I was born on a wild and woolly mountain?"

"Great guns!" ejaculated Webb. "Will wonders ever cease! You don't mean to tell me that you're from Arizona?"

"But I do, though. I suppose you think, just because I act sometimes more like a girl than a boy, that I was born in Boston. Tom thought so, too."

"Well, I do confess to some such rash thoughts." William was staring in amazement at the little fellow before him. He was more puzzled than ever at the frank statement of this delicate golden-haired boy.

Oswald merely laughed once more at the puzzled look on William's face, and continued: "I might surprise you yet, William. Just you wait a few days until I manage to get rid of some of these doll manners of mine, and learn how to be a real boy. I warn you something is apt to happen then. But in the meantime," and he became suddenly serious, "don't form any opinion of me. Look!" he added, as he pointed to a nearby tree. "Do you see that bird up there?"

Both boys glanced in the direction indicated.

"It's an oriole," said Oswald in delight. "Do you want to hear him sing?"

"Yes," cried both boys in an eager chorus.

"But," added William, "you don't mean to say you can make him sing?"

"What's the use of coming from the West, if one can't do something?" laughed Oswald, and there was a twinkle in his eye. "Now keep quiet," he added, as he walked on tip-toe toward the tree. "Don't make any noise or our friend will fly away before I get a chance to put him under my spell."

For a moment the little fellow looked steadily into the tree, turning away from the two wondering boys. Oswald's curls shone this morning, and looked like real gold under the bright rays of the sun. Suddenly a sweet melody filled the air. It was clear, soft, and very sweet. The little bird in the tree turned his head to one side, listening. Again the voice repeated that song, and the oriole, in full clear tones, sent down an an-

swering call. The song of the bird was remarkably like the song of the boy.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" cried William, clapping his hands, at which the oriole took flight and flew swiftly away.

"Why did you do that?" asked Oswald, disappointed. "I would have made friends with the little fellow and he'd often come to sing to us. I had many of such friends when I lived on the mountain-side."

"But how did you do it?" asked Tom. "I'll bet you've got something in your mouth that imitates a bird when you whistle it."

Oswald became thoughtful as he answered, "Perhaps I have, Tom, but it is the whistle God gave me. There's a story back of it all; the same story I promised yesterday to tell you."

He seemed to be fighting off some sad thought, and began to walk so fast that the others were forced to hurry to keep up with him. "I'll tell you all about it, Tom, but not now."

"I guess he will surprise me yet," murmured Webb. "Anyhow, I'll take his advice and not form an opinion too soon. That little stunt was wonderful. What a voice he has!"

"Crickets!" thought Tom to himself. "I'd give anything to hear him sing a song. I'll listen to that story the first chance I get."

Oswald in the meantime hurried on, for the sad days at Bear Gulch were brought back to his mind, and he thought once more of his friends, the birds and the rabbits, and he thought of other

things, too. Did the squirrels miss him, as they played about under the wild oaks on the mountain-side, and did the lark send down his morning call? And then, those last sad days when his father lay——

But he must not think of those days now, he must forget them.

"Here we are—and Major Bray is waiting for us," remarked Tom.

With an effort, Oswald threw off his heavy thoughts and prepared to do his part in the drill. It was not as difficult a task as he had pictured it, and he managed to do himself credit. He was naturally quick to learn, so after the first few moments of indecision, he was able to follow out the different movements with a certain freedom and grace. The drill ended by class formation, each division marching, in rank of seniority, to its classroom for the morning recitations. Although Oswald was not quite as old as his two friends, he had studied under a tutor who was able to give him undivided attention, and so was more advanced than most youths who attend college for the first time. Consequently, he found himself in the same class with Tom and William. This gave him great pleasure, as he felt a strong liking for these two. He felt he could rely upon Tom, whom he had gained as a friend, and he felt, too, that he would soon be able to rely on the more thoughtless William.

The daily round of duties soon became familiar to him, and he found his life, in spite of the many

drawbacks he knew would arise, quite to his liking. His first letter to the little mother in New York was full of enthusiasm and love—and solicitude, for his mother was an invalid.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONSPIRACY.

"NOW, Handsome, just keep shady on this little deal, for if our game is found out, we'll be in wrong."

The speaker was William Webb. The youth he addressed as "Handsome," well merited the name, not because of his good looks but because of his lack of them. Frank Hurley was a tall, raw-boned youngster of uncertain age. His thin lips were unable to meet exactly, and hence one large tooth persisted in thrusting itself into undue prominence. His light gray-blue eyes were shaded by glasses of remarkable size, and his almost white hair vied with Webb's in its wildness. From the first moment of his appearance at Calixtus Academy, he had received the name of "Handsome," and it was greeted with a storm of applause. His natural good nature was not to be upset by the mere addition of a nickname. So it was that "Frank" gave way to "Handsome," altogether.

The two boys at present were seated on a bench outside the recreation room, and were talking confidentially.

"The only thing I'm afraid of," said Hurley, in answer to his friend's remark, "is that Tom Palmer will learn of our little plot. If he does, we may as well call it off."

Although Master Hurley tried to speak in a whisper, his voice was harsh, and carried too far for Webb's peace of mind.

"Make less noise with your thunder," he complained. "Tom must not hear of this little drama. He's taken a fancy to the boy and you know what that means with Palmer. As for myself, I haven't had a chance to form any opinion of Page yet, but there are qualities about him I like pretty well."

"The dear little girl!" was Hurley's expressive answer.

"Yes, I know what you mean, Handsome, but you may be mistaken. I feel as though we're going to do a favor to Page, for we'll test his mettle and if he makes good, then he's not such a dear little girl as we imagine. If he loses out, then there'll be no room for that sweet voice of his at Calixtus. What's your opinion?"

"I have none till you tell me your plan. Whatever it is, though, you can count on me, and we'll be able to get a few more to help make the fun."

"In brief, it's this, and mum's the word on your part, do you understand?"

"Does a duck swim?"

"Well, then, listen: You know Tompkins' old barn, about a half mile below our grounds? It's deserted, for the Tompkins' folks sold their horse two weeks ago. I guess they're going to get a 'Ford' or a 'Metz.' I stand in pretty good with young Elmer, so he'll lend me the use of the barn for the evening, and 'Rex,' his trick dog."

"What in barley-corn do you intend to do with the dog?"

"Hush, not so loud! There's no use advertising this show till the leading lady learns her part."

"You're as suspicious as old 'Baldy.' Nobody's around, anyhow."

"We'll need the dog before the night is over. Our next move is to have red bandannas to cover our faces so we won't be recognized, but will be taken for village toughs. We'll spring on Page just after night prayers as he is going from the chapel to the dormitory——"

"Hold on, Spider, not too fast. Don't forget the little things. How are we going to persuade the night-prefect that we're in bed while we enjoy this barn-dance at Tompkins'?"

"Oh, that part's easy enough. Wednesday night there's a convention of some kind or other in Richmond, and he's going there with Father Royce. I heard him say so yesterday. And they're going to let Palmer put out the lights at 9:30."

"What'll Tom think when he misses Oswald?"

"That's one of our difficulties. We must work fast. He'll never think of Tompkins' barn if we can get out of ear-shot before the alarm is raised."

"We're taking a long chance, believe me!"

"Oh, stop it! You're not the one to get the white feather. After we spring on Page, we'll gag him gently, then blindfold him, pretending we're a crowd of toughs from the village, out to

hurt any of the college boys. It's just luck, you see, that Page happens to be the victim."

"That sounds good! Go on."

"The rest is easy. We'll take him to the barn, and make believe to brand him with hot irons. We can do that easy enough. We'll get ice, sharpen it to a point, and, after rubbing his arm to get it smarting a bit, apply the ice. It feels just like a sword wound, and the melting ice feels like blood."

"I never heard that stunt pulled off, but it sounds bully. What if he faints?"

"Well, if he does, we know before we go any further that he's got no sand. But I guess he'll last a bit longer than that."

"What comes next?"

"We'll tie a rope under his arms, and let him hang from the rafters of the barn. Rex will be just below and will bark and carry on something great when he sees him. That'll be about all Oswald Page from Arizona will be able to stand, I'm thinking."

"Say, Spider, you're a genius. But I don't like the idea of doing him any harm."

"I've thought that out. I like him too much, even now, to hurt him in any way, but I guess that end will be all right. He might faint, but that's all, and that will only help complete our plan."

"How complete our plan?"

"Well, you see, as soon as he faints we run and let Tompkins handle him for a minute. Then we

form into a relief committee, and rescue our dear college brother from the hands of the toughs. You see, we were on their trail from the time they took him, and we get to him just in the nick of time; have a grand imaginary battle with plenty of noise—and then we're heroes, and there's no trouble to be feared, for we'll be innocent. His own story of the toughs will substantiate our own, even to the rescue part if he comes to in time. Tompkins will take care of that part of it."

"Well, I guess I'm on, Spider, but there's one or two points that need clearing up yet."

"You leave it to me, Handsome. In the meantime get the crowd together. Not over four, you know, because we've got to keep quiet."

"So long, Bill. I'll get the other fellows all right, but it's going to take some oratory to show them the easy side of it."

"Not so hard, I guess. They're all willing to get a friendly crack at the little doll from Bear Gulch."

Then the two plotters separated—and Tom Palmer, who, throughout the whole conversation, had sat just inside the recreation hall, began to smile. Every word had come to him through the open window, and he was highly pleased with what he had heard.

"I think I'll let that little plot work out!" he mused. "But of course it must be changed a little. The dramatic climax isn't strong enough. We'll give the 'little doll from Bear Gulch' a more active and honorable part—but the rub is, will he

be able to do it? It'll take nerve. Yet somehow, in spite of all his pretty ways, I'll bank on Oswald Page to play his part like a soldier. Yes, sir, I'll chance it!"

Somehow, the thought that ran through Tom Palmer's mind, whatever it was, seemed to cause him great pleasure, for his mouth was wreathed in a broad grin as he hastened out into the yard to join a game of "Muggin's licks" that was just being formed. When he reached the busy scene, he saw Oswald running, crying out in his pleasant treble:

"May I play, too? I don't know much about baseball, but I'd love to learn!"

"Sure, angel-face, come along! You take center for now. All the other places are filled. Come along, Tom, get in the box. We reserved 'pitch' for you. We saw you coming."

"All right, fellows, let's have the ball," cried out the willing Tom, and he was pleased to note that Oswald was going to try his best to "make good" even in baseball.

The game was soon in full progress, and a most enjoyable hour was spent, although it was rather hard and tiresome work to Oswald, who had never played baseball, or in fact any of the games so much loved by the average boy. His mistakes were really comical, but his companions merely laughed and encouraged him. In "Muggin's licks," as any boy can tell you, there are no sides, two boys only being "in bats" at a time. Whenever one boy is called out he goes to the lowest

place in the field, left field if there is a full number of players, and the player occupying the nearest position to the bat is promoted to the plate and receives his turn batting, and all the others move up one position. If a fielder catches a fly from the bat, he goes immediately to the plate and takes his turn at the bat. The game is very interesting to all boys, and when there are not eighteen players, it is often played rather than choosing up sides and having a deficient team. Several times Oswald had a fine chance to catch an easy fly, but the first time he ran away from the ball as he saw it descending; the second time he held his open hands up for it, but forgot to close them as the ball landed in them, with the consequence that it quickly rolled to the ground, and he kicked it about twenty feet before he finally landed it. Then, in his endeavor to throw the ball from center field to home plate, he almost wrenched his arm off, and the ball landed a dozen feet behind him.

Everybody, including Oswald himself, thoroughly enjoyed it. However, before the day was over, he made a fine catch and got a chance to show that he was better at the bat than in the field; for his quick eye would not let him strike out. True, his hit was not a "homer," but he got first on it, and scored his run. The second time up he was called out on a fly that was caught by the shortstop. The game was then called, for the evening study bell had rung.

"Well," said Tom, as he washed up and pre-

pared for an hour's study before supper, "you'll make a ball player if you keep on."

Oswald was perfectly serious as he asked, "Do you think I will, Tom? I'd love to play a good game; it's fine."

"Just you wait till tomorrow, and then tell me how your arm feels. I'm afraid you won't want to play again for a few days. But say, Page, I must see you alone after supper, so go out to the left hand-ball alley. I'll be down there right after the meal. Be sure and be alone. I've got something to tell you."

"I'll be there, Tom, without fail. So long till then."

"He's coming on great," thought Tom as he entered the study hall and got out his books. "A week ago 'so long' was not in his vocabulary, and now it seems to come natural. I'd be willing to bank on that little angel face against any of them. I think there's going to be fun at Tompkins' barn Wednesday night. I guess I'll be there myself to enjoy it."

CHAPTER V

A SURPRISE IN TOMPKINS' BARN.

"NOW, Pete, grab the little wretch."

"We'll tan him well this time!"

A sudden scuffle disturbed the quiet of the night, but it was short and almost noiseless.

"Have you got him? Don't let him slip away; he's an eel!"

"Ouch! say, let go my sore arm! I played baseball yesterday. What do you think you——"

But the five "village toughs" had by now overpowered their victim, and the first speaker laid a rough hand over his mouth.

"One word from you, Smarty, and we'll make more'n yer arm sore. You college guys is a fresh bunch, but dis is our turn."

"What d'ye say, Pete? Shall we string 'im? I've got a rope."

"None o' that talk, Hi. We can't take no such chances here."

"Swingin's too good fer 'im, anyhow," mumbled the ferocious chap with the rope.

"Let's move," cautiously whispered the leader. "I'm afraid the alarm will soon be given and we'd better get out of harm's way."

Oswald Page smiled to himself at this for William Webb, in his fear of being caught by Tom Palmer, completely forgot for a moment his rôle

of "village tough," and spoke in his natural voice.

The night was indeed most suitable for the work at hand. No moon had been able to pierce the threatening clouds. It was dark and shadowless. Once or twice a distant rumble seemed to foretell a late thunder-storm, a not uncommon thing in the South, even as late in the autumn as November. Everything seemed to favor the conspirators, and they were in high glee as they gloated over their prisoner, and hinted at all sorts of dire cruelty.

Oswald, after his first feeble resistance, lapsed into a passive attitude. He refused to walk or to move, giving the impression that fear had rendered him powerless. The conspirators, however, found him a light burden, and willingly carried him to the scene of action. They had not only tied a handkerchief securely over his mouth to keep him from making an outcry, but they had also blindfolded him, as a safer means of remaining unrecognized themselves.

"We got away with it all right this trip, I guess," remarked "Pete," after they had placed some distance between themselves and the school.

"Things are coming our way sure," came the answer, "but I begin to feel him getting heavy. Take a hand here, 'Pete'; with his wriggling, I can't hold him."

"You cut that fresh stuff, kid, or you'll get more'n is comin' to you," threatened "Pete."

"Lay still or we'll show you how we can make you, d'ye see?"

Oswald evidently did not "see," for a more violent wriggle was his only answer; and "Pete," who, to emphasize the earnestness of his threat, had gone close to the prisoner, received his captive's foot in the pit of the stomach, and retired with a groan.

When the conspirators reached the barn they set their prisoner on his feet without a guard. As soon as he was free, Oswald, using his ear as a guide, rushed into the midst of his captors, swinging his arms right and left. He had time to land a pretty good blow on some one's face before he was overpowered and pinioned. His captors began to get a little wary, and also more violent in their threats.

"I don't want to hurt him, 'Handsome,'" grumbled Webb, as he nursed his smarting eye, "but if he pulls off any more like that, I can't keep my hands off him."

"If you've got a silver half dollar, you'd better put it to that eye, or I'm afraid you'll have some hard work tomorrow trying to explain how you got a shiner."

"I haven't got a cent with me, either. I guess it won't be noticed—it feels better already. I never thought he had so much grit—and he's scared stiff, too!"

"Say, you fellows," cried one of the others, "stop honey-mooning over there and get to work. We can't stay here doing nothing all night. I

move you get this villain into the Black Hall and put him through the third degree."

"You're right, Brady. We were planning whether to use the triple pin first or the irons."

"Is the fire goin'?"

"Oh, yes! the irons hev been on the fire the last half hour. They're red hot now."

"Use them then. Here, boy, get that pretty little coat off. We've got something to show you. Now, stop that; it won't do a bit of good to put up a fight—there's almost a dozen of us, you know."

But Oswald did put up a fight, and plainly showed them that he would be no easy victim.

"Take dat rag off his face, till we see what he's goin' to do. If he isn't quiet we'll tie him up so tight he won't be able to move an eyelash. Now, youngster," added the leader, as the bandage was removed from Oswald's mouth, "what hev ye to say?"

"It does feel good to get one's jaws in sawing condition again," murmured Oswald in his sweet soprano; "now, if you'll only take this cloth off my eyes I really think I can stand the irons!"

The five conspirators stopped their various preparations, and looked with surprise at their victim. Was this the same gentle fellow they knew as Oswald Page? They had not looked for such coolness. Oswald bore the gaze of his enemies without a ruffle of excitement. The dull candle-light cast a deep shadow on his face. He was white—in fact his thin cheeks were more colorless

than usual—but a half smile played about his lips. If he had any fear in his heart, he knew how to hide it.

"Well," he asked as they still gazed at him in silence, "does my humble petition meet the satisfaction of my gentle judges?"

"Not on yer life, sweet-face," replied their leader, coming out of his trance; "your blue eyes are much safer behind that red bandanna."

"How do you know I've got blue eyes?" quickly demanded Page.

The other was lost for an answer, and the conspirators laughed at his embarrassment.

"Off with yer coat! We mean business. Here, Pete, warm up this gentleman's arm some—it needs a——"

"Ouch, get away from there! Take the left arm, *please;* I played ball yesterday." Oswald did really start with pain, for his arm was as stiff and sore as Tom Palmer had prophesied it would be.

"Well, the left arm let it be, but I can guarantee your left arm will be worse than the right after the irons do their work."

"You speak remarkably good English for a village tough," was Oswald's only answer. Again Webb was silenced. Was Page becoming suspicious, he wondered.

"We'll have to be careful what we say, fellows," he whispered to the others.

"I guess that's up to you," answered Hurley. "You seem to have made all the breaks so far."

"Come, come," cried Oswald, "bring on the irons! I can't stay here all night."

"You'll be in no hurry when you feel 'em," replied one of the five, and he began to treat Oswald's arm as though it were a razor strop. As he continued to stroke it roughly with his hand, Oswald winced under the pain.

"This is just to get the blood in circulation," said his tormentor. "Now, what letter do you want branded on?"

"Oh, no letter," replied Oswald, innocently. "Just brand a spider on my arm—that'll do nicely."

The others began to laugh, but were told rudely by Webb to "shut up." He was now a little frightened. Oswald could hear his hurried breathing, and he realized the great moment could not be much longer delayed.

One of the conspirators approached him prepared to do the "branding." Oswald wished he could tear his bandage off, but the time had not quite come. He was securely held by two of the five.

"Now, steady," cried the chief executioner, "it's fine and hot now. It ought to do a clean job. You'll carry this mark to your grave, kid." Suddenly he pressed something against the arm. A sensation of hot, burning iron pressing into the skin made Oswald feel like yelling out in pain. He gave one quick leap into the air, broke away from his surprised captors, and with a wild shout rushed to the further side of the barn.

"You bloody wretches!" he cried, and his voice assumed a wild shriek, "dare to come near me again with your infernal torments, and all my satellites shall devour you!"

"Grab him, grab him! What did you let him get away for?" roughly asked "Pete." "Get the rope! He's mad with fear!" And he laughed hollowly.

"Stand off or suffer!" dramatically cried Oswald in a tragic voice. "Balthanor, strike!" he cried aloud, and "Handsome" Hurley, who had started toward Oswald, leaped back with a cry of pain, holding both hands over his face.

"W-what's that, fellows?" he asked in fear. "Something struck me on the cheek."

"Why, there's blood on your cheek," answered another in awe.

"Well done, faithful Balthanor, spirit of the night! I see you have not forsaken me! Once more, Balthanor, strike!"

Oswald's voice was now a tremulous shriek. Without any hindrance from the others, he had torn the bandage from his eyes. This time Webb howled with pain, and hopped around on one foot. A heavy stone had fallen from somewhere, struck his instep, and seemed for the moment to have crushed it.

Now all was hubbub! To add to the scene, Nature seemed in league with the new powers, whatever they might be, for a vivid flash of lightning lighted up the barn. A chain rattled, an unearthly groan was heard, the candle was suddenly extin-

guished by an unseen force. Black darkness reigned for a moment. Then a heavy peal of thunder followed.

"Balthanor, prince of the spirit world, I come!" rang through the barn in Oswald's soprano. A vivid flash of lightning followed and lo! where but a moment before stood Oswald Page, was now but vacancy. He had indeed disappeared.

"Let's get out of this," whispered Webb—and his own voice seemed to frighten him.

Deep, unearthly tones, coming, it seemed, from the very air itself, made answer.

"Go, before the anger of Balthanor, the protector of his clients, be visited upon you!" It was a terrible moment. A peal of thunder followed immediately, another flash of lightning, something white could be seen floating through the air, the silvery laughter of Oswald Page pealed out from the darkness.

But the barn was empty.

The conspirators turned in abject fear, and fled out into the rain. Nor did they stop till they had placed considerable distance between themselves and the "haunted barn."

"Now what do you make of that?" asked Webb, when he had regained his breath and a command of his voice.

"Handsome" Hurley was still trembling.

"I saw him pass right through the air in a white cloud and out of the window!" he gasped. "*I can't make it* out. It's like a dream."

"You fellows 've got to take the blame for this night's doings," muttered one of the others. "A nice mess you've got us into."

"Well, I'm sure I never thought we were dealing with a witch—in fact, I never thought till to-night there were such things!" answered Webb.

"I can't understand it! My heart almost fell out of my mouth at that terrible voice—and then the ghost itself—did you see it, Billy?"

"Did I see it? I don't know whether it was a ghost or a cloud—I was too scared to tell."

"Well, I saw it," spoke up Hurley, positively. "It was a cloud, and Oswald Page sat on it and sailed right out of the window. I saw it all, I tell you!"

"It's too many for me—that boy's in league with something queer. I'm going to leave him alone after this."

"Let's move toward the dormitory; I'm drenched. I wish I hadn't gone into this thing."

* * *

In the meantime Oswald Page, who had not "sailed out of the window on a cloud," but had simply been raised up into the rafters by Tom Palmer, laughed loud and long.

"Oh, but that was the best yet! Did I do it right, Tom?"

"You're a brick, Page; it couldn't have been done better. But my back's almost broken from lying here on these beams."

"You lifted me up, Tom, as though I were a feather. I nearly banged my foot against the

rafters, though. If I had made a noise then, it would have spoiled the effect, wouldn't it?"

"Let's start back. I've got old Nellie hitched up, waiting for us around the bend in the lane. We'll be home before the others, and in bed when they get there."

"It seems almost a miracle that this thunderstorm came to help us. It was great, for just as I waved the sheet you brought, a big flash of lightning lit up the place, and I can tell you it was weird."

"Yes, and then I rattled the chain," laughed Tom. "They'll think you've got dealings with some sort of a black spirit; that he helped you out of the trouble, and brought you back to bed."

"Well, let's hurry. You surely did shoot Hurley's face nicely with that pin, and you have a wonderful bass voice, Tom. I was almost afraid myself when I heard you bellow."

"We've had the time of our lives to-night. Won't we have a fine chance to jolly poor Webb tomorrow. We must not give away our secret."

"He'll be afraid to come near me, lest I 'sic' Balthanor on him," laughed Oswald as they climbed into the wagon and started back to school.

* * *

When the drenched conspirators slunk noiselessly into the dormitory a half hour later, Oswald lay buried under the clothes in his bed. He shook with merriment as Webb passed him.

"I can't see through this," murmured the mystified and defeated plotter. "Here he is, sound

asleep as though nothing happened. How did he get back? I never believed in ghosts before, but this has got on my nerves!"

Oswald could not read Webb's thoughts, but he could pretty well imagine what they were, and he found it hard to hide his mirth. He did notice that William limped as he passed the bed, and his last thought before dropping off to sleep was that he trusted his "enemy" was not badly wounded from the stone hurled by the invisible spirit in the "haunted barn."

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE CABIN ON GOLD POT

THE story of the "haunted barn" leaked out somehow or other, and for a few days life was such a burden for William Webb, who displayed a well-blackened eye and a "game leg," that Oswald Page felt sorry he had played such a trick. For Page himself it was the one neat touch, carefully managed by Tom Palmer, that endeared him to the hearts of the boys at Calixtus Academy. When they heard of the plucky little fellow's clever ruse, and the way in which he so completely turned the joke on the "village toughs," they willingly overlooked his girlish voice and his polite, polished manner—they saw beyond all these points, and admired the real boy.

Webb manfully bore his defeat and all the ridicule it brought him. Far from forming a dislike for Oswald, the cause of his downfall, he began to respect him, and before long he was as hearty a defender of the "Doll from Bear Gulch" as Tom Palmer himself had ever been. Strange to say, from this day on, Oswald was to be known to all by this new name, "the Doll from Bear Gulch." He received his christening the night of his triumph, and it stuck to him as closely as the "Spider" stuck to Webb. He was, however, quickly overcoming his "doll" manners, although *careful home training* would never allow him to

relax in his many little acts of politeness and gentleness. He became a real boy, and remained a perfect gentleman.

The winter now came on rapidly, and much of the time at Calixtus was given to serious study and class-work. Very few sports were indulged in, although an unabating athletic training was carried on. One hour each day, except Sunday, was spent in the gymnasium, and all kinds of exercise and muscle-training devices were insisted upon. Gradually, under this vigorous and regular life, Oswald's pale cheeks began to regain their natural color and healthy appearance. His muscles grew hard. He hoped, before the spring again brought baseball weather, to be able to hold his own in that game so dear to the American boy. This seemed to be his greatest ambition.

His class-work proved a revelation to students and professors. He loved his books, and the hours he pored over them were well and fruitfully spent. At last Tom Palmer had found a rival, and he was forced to take second honors, yielding most graciously and willingly to his friend.

The two boys were walking together one day about the middle of March. A strong sun had been shining, and the air was remarkably warm, seeming to forecast an early spring. They sauntered slowly along, with no special object in view. Oswald had been quiet and thoughtful during the walk, and seemed saddened by some thought he was unable to shake off. However, it was Tom who spoke first.

"Do you know, Os, we've been together, you and I, for several months now, and we've become fast friends. But there's one thing I have never been able to forget, a little remark you made to me the very first day we met."

"Yes, Tom," answered Page, and his voice was low. "I know what it is. Somehow, I've had that thought all day. I will tell you the story that I meant to tell you long ago, but I put off every time, for it saddens me too much to talk of it."

"Well now, Os," quickly and sympathetically answered his friend, "if that's the case, just lay it aside once for all. You know I've no claim to the story, and I don't want to see you unhappy."

"It's been in my mind—I can't banish it a moment, so I am going to begin, Tom, if you care to listen. Do you remember that first day you asked me about a nickname, and I gave you a most ridiculous answer?"

"Yes," laughed Tom, "you said you had been called the 'Terror,' and I just howled."

"I knew you would. There was, however, another name, nickname if you wish, but it would have been even a more ridiculous one to have given the crowd. I was generally known as 'The Golden Lark.' "

"What a strange name," replied Tom; "and yet it sounds familiar—it seems to me I've heard it somewhere, but I can't recall where."

"Perhaps I could tell you, but that will come *out in the story.* It's rather long, Tom, so if you

get tired, just say the word, and I'll finish another time.

"I told you before, and I suppose everybody knows it now, owing to my nickname, that I was born in Bear Gulch in Arizona. My home was a little log hut on the side of Gold Pot Mountain, about half an hour's walk to the town. That mountain home is filled with many sweet recollections, but also of great sadness. The hut lay high up on the side of the mountain, and from it a wonderful view of the valley below could be had. The great trees and shrubs and flowers about my home were beautiful, and they possessed a certain charm which can never wear off.

"I seldom saw any of the few boys of the Gulch —there were only eighteen altogether—but even those few were nearly strangers to me, for my time was spent about the home on Gold Pot. For my friends I had the birds and the squirrels. Perhaps you can't imagine the great friendship I formed for these creatures, and the way in which they returned it, Tom; for I'm sure you've never learned to know the happy little dwellers in nature's haunts, you've never spoken their language.

"I used to sit there in the midst of the wild flowers and grass, and the squirrels would scamper across from the trees, and perch on my shoulder or my arm, and chirp to me. Then, at my call, the birds would come about, and even pick the crumbs from my hand. I learned their songs, I was able to imitate their strange cries, and so we used

to sing to each other. I was gifted with a good voice, although I did not know it at the time."

"Yes," interrupted Tom, "I remember the time when you first came here. You made the little oriole sing in the trees, and then became almost angry at us for scaring it."

Oswald continued, without even a smile at the picture his companion had recalled: "Ah, Tom, that scene is still in my mind, for it is my last recollection of Gold Pot. I was about nine years old then. One August morning I was playing as usual with my friends, the birds and the squirrels —they were my only friends except my mother and my father."

"Ah," broke in Tom, "that accounts for the fact that you told me you were not like other boys, doesn't it, Oswald?"

"Yes, it does, Tom, I suppose. Even after that, when I came to the East and saw other boys, and watched them play, I was scarcely allowed to speak to any of them.

"Well, as I played in the grass this morning, I heard a groan, then a sharp, bitter cry. I jumped up in alarm, but all was silent again. Only the rustling of the leaves broke the stillness. The birds flew away and the squirrels scampered off at my quick move. I hurried to the cabin. It was empty. I rushed off in a panic to the small mine my father worked, a few steps from the house. You know, my father was an independent miner, and dug day after day for the gold that never came. We scarcely had enough to live on

in our mountain home, but my father still lingered there, hoping that the vein of gold he felt sure to be somewhere near, would be found. It never was.

"When I reached the mine, the sight that met my eyes filled me with terror. For there was my mother, kneeling on the ground, holding dear father in her arms. He had been crushed by a cave-in at the entrance to the mine. He lived only long enough to smile upon us, and kiss the little crucifix my mother pressed to his lips. And then—he lay cold and lifeless, and my mother closed his eyes. Oh, Tom, they seem to stare at me yet, and oftentimes I wake at night, and I see those eyes staring with love and fear into mine. He didn't want to leave us alone in the world."

Oswald seemed quite overcome with grief for a moment, and remained silent, while a tear coursed down his cheek. Tom did not interrupt, for he felt the sorrow that must be in his friend's heart. His own eyes were moist, and he turned away. He could find no words of comfort.

Finally Oswald continued. "That was five years ago, Tom. Mother dragged him to the little cabin, and then her grief seemed to overcome her. She sat before him with tearless eyes—she noticed no one; she seemed to have become lost in sorrow. I took her cold hand, and pressed my lips to hers; I tried to cheer her—but I could not.

" 'Run along, little one, and play; let mother be for a little while,' she said to me. And she

turned once more to my father. I was only a child, Tom, but I was more thoughtful than most children, for I had been much by myself and had learned to reason out things. We were alone, mother and I, alone and penniless. There was nothing left but the cabin and father's tools. What were we to do in that land alone? How were we to live?

"As I thought of these things I put my arm around her neck, and whispered in her ear, 'Courage, dear mother; I am getting big and strong now, and I can earn a lot of money. Do not cry any more, mother.'

"Even in her sorrow she smiled at my words, and drew me closer to her as a tremor shook her whole being.

" 'Ah, my child,' she said, and the tears came afresh, 'what can you do? You don't know what you say, my Lark, for the world has no room for the helpless. Our only hope now rests in the dear God of Heaven, so let us pray to Him and His holy Mother.'

" 'I have prayed, mother; I prayed to-day under the great oak!' I eagerly cried. 'And the squirrels and the birds seemed to pray with me, and so I know that I can help you, for they told me so.'

" 'My poor little innocent one!' cried my mother, and my words seemed rather to increase her sorrow than lessen it. I turned from the room and wandered out into the field to seek help from my friends. I sat under the oak, and

looked down into the deep valley. I felt so lonely then, I could not keep back the tears. A little gray squirrel began to chat above my head; and suddenly he dropped upon my shoulder. I talked to him as though he understood every word. I really thought he did. Another little fellow soon perched himself on his haunches before me, and began to chirp his willingness to join the council. He held a walnut to his mouth, and blinked at me every moment—they had no fear of me at all. I told them my story, and insisted upon the fact that I must now earn bread for my mother, and that I must be a man and no longer a child. Just as I reached this point in my story I heard, as though in answer to my appeal for help, the soft, sweet song of the hermit thrush. He was but a few feet from me, and I believe at this minute just as firmly as I did then, that his song was meant for me.

"In an instant I was on my feet. So sudden was my move that my little counselors scattered in fear. The squirrel dropped his walnut and ran for the tree, the warbler ceased his song and flew to a distant bush. The thrush had told me what to do; I would not wait a moment. I hurried down the hillside, nor did I stop to take breath until I reached a two-story building in the center of the village. Over the door a rude sign explained to the stranger that this was the 'Lost Claim Hotel.' Out of breath, I raced into the bar, which was also the office. I was greeted by big Bill Saunders, whose naturally gruff voice was

softened as he saw me, for he had heard of our trouble, and had already offered to do all he could to help us.

" 'Hello, Terror, what's the matter now?' he asked. It was in the village that I received the name of 'Terror.'

CHAPTER VII

THE STRANGER

"'IS the stranger in?' I asked in a voice which vainly sought to hide excitement.

"'I guess you mean Mr. Alexander Goselip, eh, sonny?' And Bill referred to an old book in which he recorded all his out-of-town guests. (He had twenty names then, the fruit of eight years' business.)

"'Yes, Mr. Goselip,' I replied; 'that's the one.' I felt some degree of boyish pride, for I knew Bill was wondering, down deep in his good old heart, what business I could have with the wealthy visitor from the East. Without asking me the question, however, he directed me to the room.

"I timidly knocked at the door. A loud, hearty 'Come in' immediately rang out. I lost courage, and I believe I would have turned and fled, if I had not felt the curious gaze of Bill Saunders. I pushed open the door and entered. At the further end of this comfortable room sat a large, neatly dressed man, with his back to me. He did not even turn as I entered. I stood, my last spark of courage ebbing quickly. As I remained silent, he turned with an impatient, 'Well, what do you—' But when he saw me he did not finish his sentence. Instead, he rose from his chair and came toward me. Both hands were stretched out in welcome, a smile quickly took place of the

frown, and he cried out, 'By my hilt, I had not expected such a pleasure! You're welcome, sonny,' and he held both my hands. 'Take a seat. Downright glad to see you!' His smile deepened as he gently pushed me into a large chair.

"I could not remove my eyes from that grand old man. But he was not old—he had scarcely turned thirty, as I found out afterward, though his hair was white as the winter snow on Gold Pot. His eyes were large and bright, and there was a snap to them that I later learned to understand and to love. I began to feel at ease in the big chair and stared up at this man. But I soon lowered my eyes and began to finger my hat, for he was looking at me, and the smile had given way to a study of my face.

"Finally I gained confidence enough to begin. 'I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Goselip, if I am——'

" 'Not at all, little golden-hair,' he answered, and his mellow laugh rang through the room. 'You're the most welcome visitor I've had in some days. I'm tired of this dull place.'

"Once more I picked up courage. 'I heard, sir, that you were manager of some actor business in the East——'

" 'Yes, Pleasant-voice, I've been in the actor business.' He repeated my awkward expression quite seriously. 'But they knocked me out on three strikes. Neurasthenia, the doctors said, but *I guess that* was because I swore at them. They

then sent me to the bench, and so here I am, not even fit for the bush league, nursing a set of runaway nerves. That's why, sonny, and by my silk socks, this bracing air would make a dead man dance at his own funeral.'

"I had not understood much of his strange talk, but I winced at this last remark, for I thought of my father in the cabin on the mountain-side. Mr. Goselip's free and easy way of treating me as his equal, however, calmed me, and I spoke quite glibly.

" 'I've got to get to work now to earn bread for my mother,' I explained, 'for father has left us (I could not say 'died'), and I'm the man of the house. So I came to you to see if you want an actor. I can sing real well, so Bill Saunders and Father Lambert say, and so I thought I might do.'

"My voice trailed off, and I ended with a half sob as I noticed the expression of amused pity on the manager's face.

" 'So you are the man of the house now?' he asked as he surveyed me slowly from head to foot. I sat straight up in my chair, in order to look as tall as possible. He looked at me for some time, but when he became aware of my earnest expression, he said gently, 'Well, chorister, let me hear you sing.'

"I had often heard the villagers say that my voice was sweet, and every time that Father Lambert came from Meadville he would ask me to sing at the Mass, and he loved to call me his little

'Lark.' All this had meant little except that I found it a great pleasure to sing at Mass, and to please dear Father Lambert. My delight, as I told you before, was to go out in the woods, where no one could hear me, except my dearest friends, the birds, and there I would sing, and the birds would answer me from the trees. I listened to all their songs, and used to try to imitate their melodies. So now, sitting there by the open window, I began to sing. It was the 'Lark's Awakening,' a little song Father Lambert had once taught me, but which I had changed a little myself to introduce the call of the lark. My soul entered into that song, for did not my future and the future of my dear mother depend on it? I pictured her up there in the cabin on the mountain-side, and an added tremor came into my voice. Soon, however, as I got lost in the song, these sad thoughts left me—I forgot that I was in the rooms of the 'Lost Claim,' I forgot that Mr. Goselip's eyes were upon me, I forgot all but the song and the lark. And so I imitated the sweet call of the bird, for I had spent my life listening to him and learning. I rose from my chair in order to give freer vent to the notes that came forth from my throat. I stood beside the window, and sang as I had never sung before. When I finished, there came the answering melody from a little bird, who had flown right up to the window before which I stood.

"I turned to the manager, now that the song was over, and I thought once more of my mis-

sion. His eyes were wide, his face wore a tense expression; he bent forward and grasped me by the shoulder. His voice was hoarse as he asked: 'Child, will your mother let you come with me?'

"I stepped back. His grip hurt. As I stood before him I felt, not like an Eastern boy, brought up in luxury and ease by a mother who could grant him every need, not like one who understands the difficulties of the world, but like the mountain bird—resolute, free, independent—so I answered, straightening up before him, 'I am the man of the house now; mother will let me go, for I must make money.'

"My words must have formed quite a contrast to my voice and my half-girlish manner, for Mr. Goselip laughed a little chuckle of a laugh, as he settled down once more in his chair. 'By the horns of Taurus,' he murmured more to himself than to me, 'that was wonderful! There's a fortune here, and by Hector's bow, we'll get it!' Then to me he added, 'Sit down, my boy, and tell me about yourself and your mother.'

"I told him all: how the luck was against poor father, how he had toiled early and late, expecting each day to find a fortune. I told him how the mine fell in yesterday, and how my poor mother was weeping beside my father's body. I grew excited as I told my story; tears coursed down my cheeks, my voice trembled as I tried to keep back the sobs. At last I finished, repeating once more that I must now become the man of the house.

"My new-found friend seemed greatly moved. When I finished, he slowly rose from his seat, stood over me and placed his hand upon my hair. 'Be brave, my robin,' he said; 'I'll come up to see you and your mother this afternoon. Perhaps I can help a bit. Good-by for now, little fellow, and remember, you're the man of the house!'

"A few weeks later, Mr. Goselip, whom I had already learned to love, my mother and myself, arrived in Boston. I was in the best of spirits, for every minute new, strange and beautiful wonders presented themselves to my eyes. I seemed to be dreaming it all, and I feared to wake up any moment and find not the rush and roar of South Station, but the tumbling of the Black Falls on Gold Pot Mountain. What a difference between the fine, smooth-paved streets, with their continual hubbub of rattling wagons and cars, and the quiet of my former mountain home. Is it any wonder that I was dazed? I slipped my hand into the hand of my friend as we went down the steps of the Park Street Subway. I could not understand how such heavy cars (the trolleys) could be found under the earth, as I expressed it, and I expected every moment to have all Boston Common fall through upon our heads. That first ride on the trolleys was a thrilling one for me, and it was with a sense of relief that we reached the bright sunlight.

"We sped along through the deafening roar of the busy city, we passed buildings that seemed to rise almost to the skies. Finally we stopped in

front of what seemed to me to be the grandest of all. Pillars of marble, large, oval-shaped windows, with beautiful curtains, were on either side of a double entrance. A colored porter came, all bows and smiles, and took my new valise from me. I was going to reclaim it, but Mr. Goselip reassured me, and placed something in the grinning porter's hand. Then there were more bows and finally he disappeared. Mr. Goselip went up to the desk to enter our names, while mother and I sank into cushioned chairs.

"I could not hide my delight when I looked about me. There seemed to be thousands of lights flickering from the huge candelabrum above our heads, and the most beautiful pictures adorned the walls on either side. I thought of Bill Saunders and contrasted the 'Lost Claim' with this. Surely his whole building could almost fit into the little room behind the clerk's desk. My dreams, however, were now interrupted by Mr. Goselip who, in company with the same porter who had disappeared with my valise a short time ago, offered to show us our rooms. We entered the elevator, and a dizzy sensation came over me as we rose straight up in the air. I stumbled and almost fell when I got off and tried to walk on the upper floor, and Mr. Goselip laughed. Telling us that his rooms were right below ours, he pointed out our door, and then left us.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GOLDEN LARK

"NEW wonders were in store for me as I entered the fairyland we were to call our rooms. I clapped my hands in delight and was surprised when little mother only sighed and began to weep. She could not forget poor father, sleeping alone on the side of Gold Pot, and many times during the days she would weep and press me close to her heart saying, 'Yes, my little Lark, you are the man of the house, now!' It made me feel proud and I resolved to prove worthy of my mother's trust.

"From the moment that we left our home on the mountain-side, mother's health was very poor, and some days she could scarcely stand, for her head pained her. I would sit beside her, holding her burning hand in mine for hours. Sometimes I would sing and this seemed to make her feel better, for she would always clasp me closer when I finished my song, and kiss me many times. Mr. Goselip was always trying to please her, and would bring her flowers and many little things to make her more cheerful. He was a very good friend, and mother soon learned to trust him as I did myself.

"From the first week I reached Boston, my training began. I was introduced to a comical

little man—he had jet-black hair, curly and long, a tiny mustache which he seemed always to be trying to twist at each end. His complexion was dark and olive colored. He spoke with a foreign pronunciation—he was Italian. Mr. Goselip introduced me as 'Master Lark,' but I could never remember my tutor's name. He was the director of some big opera company, I believe. He looked me over most critically, and seemed somewhat disappointed, for he turned to Mr. Goselip and asked in his funny little accent, 'Are you sure, Fred? You know it means much money, a big gamble.'

" 'I stake my last coin,' was the only answer Mr. Goselip made, and he put his arm around my shoulder as though he resented the Italian's suspicion.

"I sang that day my first song since the one in the room of the 'Lost Claim.' My new master seemed quite pleased, for he smiled and bowed his head in satisfaction, but after I had finished he had all kinds of fault to find. He explained how I must open my mouth, to just what part of the mouth my voice should be thrown, the exact volume I should use for each note, and a whole lot more I could not at first remember. Then he started me off to sing the scales up and down, with no words but only 'la la,' and no melody whatever. It was very tiresome, but I spent only about forty minutes with him, and he did more talking than I did singing.

"I can skip over a period of four months now,

Twice a day I took my lesson from the Italian professor, and every morning and again at night, I went through voice exercises with Mr. Goselip. The days were one round of pleasure, for we would go off on many excursions.

"Little mother's health did not improve, and she seldom joined us. She would insist, however, that I should go out with my friend, and in fact I was forced to go, for Mr. Goselip said it was part of my training. I could almost cry, however, when I kissed the white lips of my mother and heard her sweet voice blessing me, as I started for our walk. She was very patient and never complained, but I know her heart was still on Gold Pot.

"At last the great day came that I was to sing before the public. Great billboards were scattered about announcing the first appearance of 'The Golden Lark,' and glaring pictures appeared which were supposed to represent myself. I was dressed in costly clothes of purple with gold trimmings, and on my arm a little bird was perched.

"I may as well hurry over this period, Tom, for it was the same day after day. Perhaps you see now why the name 'The Golden Lark' was familiar to you, for you have, I suppose, seen accounts of that popular bird in the papers. I sang before crowds of people, I heard their applause, and I sang again. I went from Boston to New York, where the same programme was followed out. So three years passed by, and I had become quite

famous. I had even gone to London, and to Rome, where I sang before the Pope, and he blessed me and gave me a beautiful medal.

"One night a concert was to be given in Boston before a fashionable audience. All the city officials, and even the governor of the State were to be present, and the president of Harvard had a box. I was to sing. My mother's health had improved during our trip to Europe, so this night she felt strong enough to attend.

"The curtain rose, and the various artists went through their parts. My little Italian professor, whom I was permitted to call Signor Pietro, this being his first name, was excited, and Mr. Goselip himself was pacing nervously up and down. I alone was unconcerned, for I could see no difference in this concert and the others at which I had sung. So I walked quietly to the footlights when my turn came and bowed as usual. The applause that greeted me did not bother me, for I had often heard it before.

"I began by singing a little opera in Italian that Signor Pietro had taught me. I had sung it before the Pope when in Rome, and he had patted me on the head when I finished. My voice was clear this night, I longed to stay and sing for hours. I finished my song and bowed as usual, preparing to leave the stage, but Mr. Goselip met me half way, and frantically motioned me to return.

" 'Sing to them, sing!' he cried, and his excited voice could be heard above the applause, 'Sing

again! Your very best! Keep their minds off it!'

"I returned in amazement and the applause ended. 'Keep their minds off what?' I wondered to myself. Instinctively I looked back to see Mr. Goselip once more. I did not see him, but a blue wreath of smoke curling its way up through the floor from the dressing-rooms. My heart rose in my mouth, for I knew then the part I was to play. I knew what I was to do. Could I? I asked myself.

"I smelled the smoke now, but it had not reached the place where I stood. I looked out at the audience before me, and began again—'Adair's Lament,' a little song composed for me by Signor Pietro. It was a pretty thing and suited to my voice. I put my whole soul into the song, at the same time studying the faces before me until I had found my mother's. For her sake I must win attention, and keep the minds of all from the danger that lurked behind, for a panic in that audience might mean death—her death. I shuddered, and my voice trembled. The odor of the smoke began to grow oppressive, I found it difficult to sing, but I struggled on. I finished, and even before a hand was raised in applause, I had started another. It was the 'Lark's Awakening,' my own favorite, and my mother's. Once more I caught my mother's eye. She alone seemed to realize that there was danger. Perhaps she could see the whiteness of my face, perhaps she could detect the strain in my voice, for the smoke was thick and was choking me. Yet I sang on, with no thought of giving

up. I heard Mr. Goselip whisper, almost at my ear, 'Be brave, little Lark!' and his voice sounded the same as it did that first afternoon in the 'Lost Claim.' 'Be brave, little Lark! Only a few minutes more! Move up nearer the lights—nearer still!' I moved close to the footlights, although I was so unsteady and so nearly overcome that I almost stumbled. I heard a drop curtain fall behind me. For a moment it seemed to relieve me from the smoke, but soon the choking sensation returned and became unbearable. How strange it was that the people did not detect it, and rise in fear!

"In the midst of my song an idea came to me. I broke off, and started on another—a song I was to sing for the first time the following week in New York. It was descriptive—it told of a raging fire in a forest, and the wild panic of the birds who cried out with notes of fear and tried to escape from the burning trees, and from the horrible death which raged about them. The people eagerly caught the words and the meaning, and, I suppose, they seemed to take the smell of smoke as an added stage effect. I was quickly losing strength. I looked down at my mother—she was half standing. An agony of fear distorted her face; I believe she would have cried out but fear had taken away her voice. I looked into the flies to see Mr. Goselip; he smiled and whispered: 'A moment longer, my son, a moment longer!'—but just then his voice was drowned by a loud crash of falling timber, a dark cloud of smoke hurled

itself defiantly onto the stage, and enveloped me in its smothering gloom. I staggered and fell—but I landed in the arms of my watchful friend.

"The last I heard was a piercing shriek. I believe it came from my mother. Then the earnest tones of Mr. Goselip as he shouted commands to the people. A commotion followed and was swallowed up, for I had fainted and knew no more.

"During my song, the ushers and firemen had been quietly emptying the upper galleries of the hall, and surrounding the other parts to insure order and no panic. Very soon, so I was told afterward, the whole auditorium was cleared of people. No panic ensued, no one had been injured. The fire, however, could not be quelled until most of the hall had been destroyed.

"All this I did not know until later, for I lay miserably in the arms of my friend, whom I had helped save the day. It was some hours afterward that I found myself in my bed at the hotel. I would have asked for an explanation, but my voice had gone. And when I began slowly to realize what had happened, that agonizing scream seemed to ring once more in my ears. I tried to cry out. I could make no sound.

"Mr. Goselip, who was at my bedside, saw my effort. He took my hand in his and kissed it. 'Everything will be all right, my little hero! You did nobly, everything will be all right soon.'

"I was not satisfied, for I could not see my mother. She was not at my bedside. A horrible suspicion flashed through my mind. I turned eyes of

fear up to my friend, appeal in them. He understood and answered softly, 'The little mother is lying down, my hero! We must not disturb her. It was hard for her, you know, so she is resting a while. Sleep now, if you can, and all will be well.'

"I breathed easier at this, but I found out later the clever way in which he had hidden the truth from me. He was right. Mother was lying down and resting. From the moment of that scream, her mind had given away, and she knew nothing. She fell, was carefully carried to the hotel, and put under the care of a trained nurse. For weeks after I had passed through the danger point, and was able to walk about a little during the day, she lingered, fighting the battle. Gradually she gained strength. But her mind had fled. She did not even know me when I leaned over her pillow and kissed her white face. If I could but sing to her! But my voice was weak and rough—there was no power left for song. For months her mind remained a blank. When I begged her to try and recall my face, she would smile and answer sweetly, 'Yes, you are a little fire-hero I once read about in a book. You are a good fire-hero, but I only see you in my dreams.' Whatever we spoke of, she merely answered something about a fire, or a fire-hero.

"At last, however, mother's mind partially returned, and she was able, through the help and kindness of Mr. Goselip, whom we now had reason to love, to make arrangements for my entrance to

Calixtus. And as I left her, she was lonesome, but happy. The least mention of fire, however, or even the sound of the gong, would cause wild excitement, and for hours her mind would wander.

"To-day I received a letter from Mr. Goselip, and it contained the sad news that mother's mind had given way again, that for the past two weeks she has not even recognized her friends. I feared something was wrong, for I had not heard from her.

"So that is my story, Tom, and you can see now why it costs me so much pain to speak of it. I have been praying hard for mother, Tom, and some time God will hear my prayer. When my voice returns, I will sing to her and perhaps then I can dispel the dark cloud forever. Poor little mother!"

Oswald sat down on a bench, for he and Tom had reached the yard once more. The tears were falling unchecked from Tom's eyes—he could not hide them, he did not even try. They sat in silence for some time, and finally Tom spoke softly as he looked at Oswald.

"We chumps here dared to complain that you were not half a boy. How could you have patience with us, Oswald? It is we who are not half the gentlemen we should be—and you are a man and a hero."

"No, Tom, you were right. I acted more like a girl than a boy, for I never really had the chance to learn how to act before I came. You've

helped me in that line. All the boys at Calixtus have helped me, and they're a fine crowd. I'm glad I'm here. My life has been happy. There is but this one sorrow——"

"And that, too, will pass away, Oswald. We'll pray together, you and I. We'll make novena after novena, and I know it will be all right."

"Thanks, Tom. There's the bell ringing for supper. We look like two forlorn tramps. Let's brace up and cheer up. You know, I've had to do that for a long time now, and the boys never dream of the little pain I carry with me."

"You're a hero, Os! You're a brick!"

Oswald Page smiled his happiest, and, with his handkerchief, flicked a bit of dust off his shoes.

"You're a flatterer, Tom!" he answered. "You're a flatterer."

CHAPTER IX

BASEBALL WEATHER—AND A SCHEME

"NOW, Os, let's get at it once more. A little more practise, and you'll surprise them all."

"This is great sport, Tom. But I can't put any speed in it."

"You don't need so much speed, I tell you. It's the quick delivery and the curves that count. There, that's a beauty! Now, mix 'em up a bit and let's have a drop."

"Is that three fingers flat, Tom?"

"Yes. Hold the ball somewhat in the palm of your hand. See, like this—and then throw it—like this."

Tom Palmer emphasized each word by the proper action, and threw the ball at Webb, who stood some distance away with the glove.

"You're wors'n the Doll," he complained, as he reached high for Tom's throw.

"Oh, I'm not exactly a pitcher, Spider," Tom replied, "but I guess you managed to get it without climbing very high!"

"It looks easy," sighed Oswald. "Only I don't seem to get it right."

"Yes, you do, Os; all you need now is more practise and control. You've got a few new ones there that'll fool any batter. Look out, Webb!"

"Coming," cried the catcher, as he reached for

a wide one. "Trim down that arm of yours, Doll; you've got the makin's, I can see."

"Well, if practise will do it," cried Oswald, "I'll get there, for I just love the game. Do you think I'll make a pitcher, Tom?"

"It'll take some time before you'd last nine innings, I'm afraid, but after another week or two I'll match you for a few innings with the best we've got. Now, come on; get to work once more! Take your time, watch the catcher, get your eye on the plate, and let her drive. Remember each ball counts, for we don't want our man to walk any more than he has to to make a home run."

"It must be exciting to get into a real game," sighed Oswald.

"You'll be there before long. If we can keep our little practise bouts secret for two weeks more, Os, we'll create a sensation."

"And if I fail, Tom?"

" 'In the lexicon of youth, there's no such word as fail,' " quoted the scholar.

In truth, Oswald Page was steadily becoming a changed boy. Since the spring sun had put some warmth in the air, he, with Tom Palmer and William Webb, spent an hour every day practising with ball and glove. Tom, who was still bent on making a real boy of his charge, would not feel successful until he could see Oswald in a baseball uniform and on the field. As we may remember, Oswald was not what one might call a ball player, but his eye was quick and his nerves steady. These two excellent qualities, thought Tom, would go far

toward making a good beginning, and so he began the work of training. He took Webb into his confidence, for the three were now faithful friends. Oswald was ambitious. He loved the game, and he loved success in whatever branch he put his hand to, so the training began, and went ahead steadily. It was carried on behind the poultry yard of the college grounds. None of the other boys were let into the secret, for the whole affair was to be in the form of a mild sensation.

The Calixtus team was not, perhaps, the strongest juvenile aggregation in the world; they made no such pretense, but they did hold their own in the grammar school league around Richmond, and last year would have won the pennant if it had not been for the Richmond Reds. The youngsters of this nine were clever little players, and went through their season of twenty games with only three defeats.

The Calixtus team had suffered twice at their hands in a series for the pennant. Another great fight was looked forward to this year, and Tom Palmer, the Calixtus captain, was hopeful of success. Webb, who was manager of the team, had already issued his schedule, and on it could be seen the Richmond Reds slated for the opening game of the season and the closing one. The season was to open on the home grounds, the 15th of April, and so the respective teams were already on the field for practise.

Tom Palmer was actuated by two motives this year, and they gave rise to a scheme in his mind.

He felt great loyalty to Calixtus, and nothing would suit him better than to bring victory to the school. He could not, however, forget his friend, Oswald Page, and he saw here a way to bring his friend still closer to the hearts of all. So each day he secretly put him through a severe drill. For a week or so Oswald's arm was quite sore from the strain, but the clever training of his friend soon overcame this. Gradually the ball seemed to come into control and Oswald did remarkably well. He was not yet what one could call a "dark horse," for he had little speed and only fair control. But Tom did not give up, and as long as he was hopeful, Oswald tried. The two boys were remarkably gifted with that stick-to-it spirit which we long ago recognized in Tom. So the practise work continued in the shade of the poultry yard.

"Now," cried Tom, as Oswald, with a flushed and excited face, studied each new point given him, "now I'll get a bat, and see if I can knock a home run from your pitching."

"I'll bet I strike you out first shot," laughed Oswald.

"Watch your signals, and we'll make some battery, Dolly," cried out Webb.

Tom got a large stick for a bat, and using a book for home plate, he stood ready for action.

"Come on, now, Mr. Pitcher," he cried, as he slapped the book a resounding blow with his improvised bat. "Do your best. I'm the heavy hitter of the Richmond Reds."

"One strike," called out Webb, as Oswald drove the ball with all his might at Tom. This latter gentleman ducked quickly, for the ball seemed to be aimed right at his head.

"Good," cried the batter; "don't be afraid to scare your man; it'll make him weak if he's anyway green."

Oswald had thrown up his hands in dismay, and was about to utter profuse apologies for his carelessness. But when he heard Tom's remark he smiled and made answer, "But I don't want to kill any one, Tom!"

"Don't you be afraid of killing any one," laughed his trainer. "There's not strength enough in your arm to knock the sweat off one's eyebrows. Just drive the first with all your might at his head, then mix in a little curve, and you'll get your man."

That night Oswald was tired, but he was also happy, for the results of the day had proved encouraging. Perhaps, after all, his great wish might come true.

His mind, however, was far from baseball as he eagerly scanned a letter that had arrived for him and was now put in his hand. A cloud came over his face, and a sigh escaped his lips. When, however, he spoke to Webb a moment later, it was with a laugh.

"If we don't get snow before morning, I guess we'll have real baseball weather tomorrow. Don't you think so, 'Spider'?"

Tom, who was near, did not notice Webb's answer, for his mind was on the letter Oswald had just been reading so seriously.

"He's a brick," thought Tom to himself. "I can tell from his face that the letter says the little mother is no better, and yet he courageously hides his trouble from us all. I love that little fellow, and I think he's bound to win at whatever he puts his hands to. He's the bravest of the brave!"

The next day was ideal. During the night a warm rain had fallen and the buds seemed to have come out almost miraculously, and little green leaves appeared on some of the trees. Oswald came back from a short early morning walk, triumphantly displaying two little violets he had found. These were indeed true and unfailing signs of spring, and as spring means baseball, the boys were anxiously and impatiently waiting for the afternoon recreation so as to get into harness.

Tom spent a busy afternoon, for he put his team through a hard training. They were all filled with the vigor of early spring, and so their baseball zeal was unlimited. Their captain availed himself of this to get in the first real serious practise of the season. Hence it was not until evening that he was able to meet his conspirators behind the poultry shed, and he found Webb and Oswald already at work when he arrived.

Tom immediately placed his book down for home-plate, and took up the stick in order "to be struck out." As Webb had not brought a glove, he stood far back of the batter, and caught the ball as it lessened its speed, for Oswald was developing quite a "fast ball." Tom smiled with satisfaction when he saw Oswald "wind up and deliver the goods." Truly, the pitcher was improving. He was becoming excited over the prospect of playing real ball, so he put his whole heart into this practise work. He would have injured his arm by too much pitching if Tom had not interfered.

So the days passed on. The violets gained courage by the bright sunshine and, under the temptation of pleasant showers, came boldly forth. The magnolias sweetened the air and beautified the country landscape. The last little chill of winter had disappeared. The college grounds became a busy and noisy gathering place for all true lovers of sport.

The great day for the game with the Richmond Reds was nearly at hand. Captain Palmer and Manager Webb were in joyful spirits, for the boys had shown up pretty well in practise. Every one was enthusiastic and every one was hopeful of success.

"I say, fellows," laughed "Handsome" Hurley the day before the great game, as he saw Oswald Page with baseball and glove running at full speed across the yard, "even the Doll has got *the craze. Look at* 'im run! If he could only

play ball as good as he runs, we'd put him in to-morrow as our heavy man."

And all the others laughed at the idea of the gentle Oswald Page being matched against the rugged Richmond Reds.

CHAPTER X

THE GAME WITH THE RICHMOND REDS

"PLAY ball!" cried Umpire Kennedy, and the game was started.

A stocky youngster with a fiery red jersey, on which was printed in white letters the name "Richmond," stepped to the bat. He looked confident, and he spit on his hands in true baseball spirit before grasping his bat.

"Handsome" Hurley stood in the pitcher's box, nervously fingering the ball. Intense silence reigned, although hundreds of young savages were banked on either side of the field, waiting for the least cause for applause.

Hurley "wound up," stepped full into the box, and let drive.

"One strike," called Kennedy, and the Calixtus boys let loose with a storm of applause.

The batter confidently leaned on his stick. He would not chance the first ball—that would be absolutely contrary to baseball luck. Perhaps that is why Hurley tossed such an easy one. Ah, what a world of trouble we cause ourselves by our enslavement to the phantom luck! Now if the Richmond husky had bit at the first easy offer, he would not, perhaps, have disgraced himself by fanning out. He threw his stick down in disgust after the third strike was called, but whatever he said was lost in the roar, for the Calixtus cheering squad were in noisy delight.

Tom Palmer walked slowly toward the pitcher's box to meet Hurley, and passed him the ball instead of tossing it. "That's the goods," he whispered; "a few more like that, 'Handsome,' and we'll have 'em all scared."

"Batter up!" cried Kennedy.

In a moment Tom was again behind the bat, and his voice could be heard consoling the second victim.

"Hard lines, old chappy—but they all do it; your turn now. Nothing to it, fellows. Just watch out! That's it, Hurley. Another one like that."

"Foul ball," called the umpire.

"They count for you, 'Handsome'; keep right at 'em. Don't give them a smell of it. Watch out there in center!" Tom's voice rang clear and loud, as the ball rose in the air from the bat. "That's the way!" he cried jubilantly, as the center fielder, after a long run, reached what had looked like a hit. "We're all together today, boys; one, two, three, that's the order."

The cheering squad once more took possession, and the air fairly rang with cries of praise for the good catch.

I suppose it would be useless for me to go into the details of that game with the Richmond Reds. Every school-boy can imagine a close game of ball, with a narrow score, good pitching, and spotless fielding. True, "Camel" O'Hara made a costly error on third, which gave the Reds their first run, but he made up for it a few minutes

later by a clever sacrifice fly which brought Sam Dillon safely across the bag to the tie score. Tom Palmer followed immediately, and knocked a clean two-bagger; 'Handsome' Hurley struck out. Then, with two down and man on second, "Legs" Brennan made a neat single and Tom scored. All this happened in the sixth, and the score stood two to one in favor of the home team.

Tom was highly elated at the outlook, for the boys were playing spotless ball. If they could hold the Reds in check now, all would be well. After Webb's fly, which was caught in left field, making three out, the teams changed position, and Tom, while getting into protector and mask, had time to glance over the crowd on the side lines. Oswald Page was there, a long stick in his hand with which he directed the cheerers. His own treble could be heard above the others.

"Before the season's out we'll give him a chance to make good," thought Tom, as he gave the proper signal to Hurley. "Not with a team like the Reds, though. We'll try him with an easy one first."

"One ball," called Kennedy.

"One strike," he called a moment later. At the third, the batter swung hard, struck the ball full, sending it straight and swift—a hot liner. Hurley jumped, but his eye was not quick enough. The ball struck his shoulder, glanced sideways, and rolled toward third base. The runner was safe.

Tom paid no attention to the runner or the ball.

He rushed hurriedly to the pitcher's box, for a look of pain had come over Hurley's face; he put his left hand over the injured shoulder, then shook his head sadly.

"That's all for today, Tom," he almost sobbed; "that one did it! I couldn't throw another ball today if the world series depended on it."

Tom looked around in dismay. What was to be done? Time was called, and the injured arm examined. Nothing serious, perhaps, but there was no question as to pitching more that day. Webb came rushing up. He whispered hurriedly to Tom.

"I don't like to do it yet, Billy; it's too soon."

"But what can we do, Tom? I'll bet on him here and now. Send him off quick to get a suit."

Tom shook his head doubtfully, but Webb continued earnestly:

"You know he can do it, Tom. I once doubted him, but those days are over. Just give me the word, and I'll send him in to dress. I feel it's safe, and it's our only chance."

"Go ahead, then, tell him; but don't let him get excited. I'm afraid we'll be sorry."

Webb waited for no more, but rushed off jubilant, while Tom sought the Richmond captain.

"Will you give us a few minutes to get a new pitcher, Fred?" he asked.

"Sure thing, Palmer; take your time! Sorry this has happened, for the game was just getting lively. Have you a 'dark horse' hidden some-

where?" And Fred Baldwin smiled as he saw Tom's troubled look.

"Judge for yourself, Fred," was all he answered, and then he hurried off to the dressing room.

Five minutes later a great cheer went up from the Calixtus rooters when they saw a new pitcher coming from the rooms. He was between Tom and Billy, and at first he could not be recognized. Who was it? "Lefty" Hill was home with a sick mother, and he was the only pitcher outside of Hurley. Nobody seemed to recognize that trim little figure in the new uniform, but when the "dark horse" turned his face, wreathed in a happy smile, the cheering stopped short, and looks of surprise and dismay were exchanged. And then began a regular hubbub. Had Tom Palmer gone crazy? Was he trying to turn a good game into a farce? What did he mean by decking out the gentle little "Doll from Bear Gulch" in a baseball suit? Why, he may as well ask old "Pop" Green to get in the box and pitch. What did it all mean, anyway?

When the Richmond Reds saw the substitute for "Handsome" Hurley, they roared in delight. Oswald Page surely did look neat and trim in a baseball suit, but he hardly impressed one as a husky pitcher. His suit was spotlessly clean, and the little cap which fitted quite snugly on his head, allowed a few stray wisps of golden curly hair to fall over his brow. His face was colorless, but his eyes snapped fire, and a determined smile

played about his lips. He had begged Webb in the dressing room not to force him into the game yet, for he felt he was not ready, but the manager only said, "Now or never, Os. Get out and make good. Grit your teeth, and remember your points. You'll be all right—I'll stake my last copper on you. The Reds are easy this year. See, they only got five hits off 'Handsome.' "

"Hurry up," cried Tom, rushing in. "You've got to do it, Page, and you can—I see it in your eyes. Just go in without a quiver, pay no attention to what any one says, but watch my signals. You'll make good."

"If you say so, Tom, I'm game," pluckily answered Oswald, and in another moment he was on his way to the field.

"Page pitching for Hurley," called out Umpire Kennedy. "Play ball!"

"Miss or Mrs.?" cried a wag, and the laugh that rose came from both sides of the field.

For a moment Oswald's eyes blurred. Then he brushed the curl from his forehead, and motioned the batter to step out of the plate. Tom saw his point, spoke a word to the umpire, the batter stepped back, and Oswald threw a practise ball over home plate. It was little more than a toss.

"Mercy," cried the same voice that had spoken a moment before, "she'll strain her arm!"

The Reds laughed, Calixtus groaned.

"Batter up!" called Kennedy.

Tom's first signal evoked a smile from Oswald,

but he prepared to carry it out. Winding up like a veteran, he let drive for the batter's head.

"Look out!" he cried in well-feigned alarm. The batter dropped to his knee, Tom jumped, caught the ball and returned it.

"Steady," he cried. "Be careful! don't kill him!"

Once more the Reds laughed.

And Calixtus groaned.

Slowly Oswald swung his arm for a second throw. He let drive with remarkable speed; the ball seemed to be coming once more for the batter's head, and once more he ducked.

"One strike," called Kennedy, and Tom laughed at the amazement of the batter.

"Fooled him that time, boy! Now you're working!" He called for the same ball. Oswald hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, and then gave it.

The batter was more prepared this time. He did not duck, although it looked as though he was going to be hit. The ball curved gracefully over the plate.

"Two strikes," called the umpire.

The Reds began to look serious.

Calixtus began to look hopeful.

"Batter's out!" cried Kennedy, for at the fourth ball, the batter swung with all his might, but the ball arrived safely in Tom's mitt.

While the next man was getting to the plate, Tom walked down to Oswald with the ball.

"I told you you could do it, Os. But be care-

ful! They're all going to lay for you now. Watch out."

"They can't scare me!" answered the Doll from Bear Gulch. "Those days are over, Tom. There's new blood in my veins to-day—fighting blood."

Tom felt hopeful, but he was excited, for he knew it was too much of a chance. He had intended to let Oswald get into the game, but not against the Richmond Reds. However, he had to make the best of it.

"Just look at the little lady wind up!" called out a wag from the opposing side.

"Isn't she a sweet thing!"

"O you doll, me for you when you grow up!"

"Quite a nice girl, isn't she?"

At these remarks, which were followed by several others of the same nature, the crowd laughed. But at last the Calixtus rooters had awakened from their stupor. "Give it to 'em, Page," they cried. "Give 'em the jitney, that'll faze 'em!"

"The jitney, that's it," filled in the chorus. And then, "Come on, boys, three cheers for Page! He's got the goods!"

"Perhaps," came the opposing challenge. "He's got to prove that. But he certainly has the looks."

Oswald was unmoved. He carefully brushed a speck of dust from his trousers, and at that the crowd roared. Tom had given him strict orders not to say a word—he feared if the Reds were to

hear that sweet soprano voice coming from a baseball pitcher, they would increase their jibes.

Not only the Reds, but Oswald's own companions were a surprised crowd at the end of that inning. True, the second man up hit over the short-stop's head and gained first. The next man walked and things began to look serious, but the side was quickly over, for only two men more had a chance. The first struck out clean, and the other knocked a high foul and Tom "nailed" it.

"Now, fellows, we've got to pile up a few runs," cried the Calixtus captain as his side came to bat. "We can't trust too much on Page. This is his first real game. We've got to help, so let's get started. Now, Billy, the fence is not so far off," he yelled to Webb, who was at the plate. "Right over now, a clean one—we need it."

Webb looked as though he could and would—but after the third strike was called he blamed the umpire.

Tom was glad when his turn came to bat. He was being pestered with all sorts of questions concerning Oswald Page as his new pitcher, for even the players were taken by surprise. He knocked a single, his second that day.

Oswald got up to bat with fear and trembling, although he nobly hid his feelings. He spat into his hands, and rubbed them in the sand—he told Tom afterwards it took more courage to perform this little act than it did to stand up before that howling mob. The first ball came, and Oswald struck at it viciously. He touched it and one

strike was called on him. The second came, but he let it go by. He was ready now, for he could see the pitcher was testing him. "One ball," he heard Kennedy call, and the voice seemed off in the distance somewhere. Tom stole second on this throw, for it was almost a wild one, and the catcher could not control himself quick enough to get the ball to second.

"Two balls." He still waited. The pitcher shook his head. That little golden-haired doll was indeed a deceiver—whether he could hit or not, he had his head right with him.

"Two strikes," called Kennedy, for Oswald had swung hard and hit nothing.

"Look out," cried the second baseman, "Jack, Jack, look, quick!"

Tom had noticed the momentary indecision of the pitcher, and, taking him off his guard, he took a wide lead off second. It was too late for the pitcher to throw to first, for he was in his box, and such a throw would have been called a balk. With more haste than judgment he drove the ball home, trusting the catcher to get it to third in time to nip Tom. But it was a wild throw—far over Oswald's head. Quick as a flash, Oswald struck at it, or rather at the air, for his bat could not come within three feet of it. He struck, threw his bat down and ran like a deer for first. The ball went on over the catcher's head, he jumped but missed it.

"Safe on first, safe on third!" cried the umpire.

A deafening roar of applause resounded through the air. By a strategy, Oswald had gained first, for on the third strike a batter has the privilege to run if the catcher misses the ball.

Brennan came to bat. He was one of the heavy hitters for Calixtus, and the Reds remembered him as such, for he had knocked a home run in the final game of last year. So they were on guard now. Oswald Page caused all sorts of trouble on first, for he was dancing around like a squirrel. He said nothing but kept his eye rivetted on the ball, his ear ready to catch the least command from the catcher.

Brennan swung at the second ball thrown. It was a high fly toward left field. There were already two out, so everybody ran. The fielder reached the ball, but muffed it. Center, who was backing him up, had it in an instant, drove it to second, and Brennan was caught. So there were three out, but Tom scored his run, leaving the score three to one.

The Reds came in with long strides. They'd show these kids real ball playing before they'd go back to the field. With that baby in the box, why not bat all 'round twice, and then end the thing? Calixtus had a lead of only two runs.

"There's nothing to it, fellows," cried out Fred Baldwin. "Just give me that stick till I start the good work. That lad can't pitch. You watch me." He swung at the first ball thrown, and met it square. It rose high in the air and

cleared the outer fence by a foot. A clean home run!

Oswald looked worried, but Tom cheered him up.

"My fault, Os," he said, "I should never have called for a high one. He does that every game. Just settle down now and it'll soon be over."

"I'm going to give 'em the new one, Tom, can I?"

"Yes, if you think you can put it over. Let it come."

Oswald braced himself in the box, carefully fingered the ball, then suddenly with merely a wrist movement, he tossed an underhand ball. It came slowly, tremblingly toward the batter, who swung at it anxiously. The ball seemed to dodge the bat and landed safely in Tom's glove. He made a quick return, and before the batter had recovered himself, Oswald had driven a speedy drop over the plate. It came singing with speed. The latter was taken unaware, and the second strike was called on him. The third was an in-shoot with a slight drop to it, and the batter was declared out.

Now the cheering began. The Calixtus boys had not known that Oswald was to be their hero in this line, and so they were all the more noisy in their praises. And, when after a few moments the side was retired, the noise was increased to a painful volume. It began to look serious for the Reds, but they did not give up.

Oswald did not have a chance to bat this time, and he felt thankful. The side retired in almost

one-two-three order, and in a moment he found himself back in the pitcher's box for the final inning.

"Hold up now, Ossy, old boy," whispered Tom, "and you'll be king of Calixtus. Three men only—just do your level best."

"Say, this is great, isn't it, Tom?" was Oswald's slangy answer.

Tom made a mistake on the first man. He was tall and slim, a good batter, but he seemed rather nervous at the plate. Tom had sized him up during the game, and thought he could be scared. So he called for a wild throw. Oswald satisfied him completely, for the ball landed somewhere near the dressing room.

"The balloon's up!" cried the Reds, "it's all off now; he's lost his eye and his nerve!"

Tom gave another signal, and Oswald answered it. The ball came right for the batter's head, but instead of ducking he merely turned sideways, and received it on the arm. He laughed and ran for first.

"Stung!" thought Tom to himself. "Stung bad! I thought I'd scare him stiff."

The next boy dropped a single and things began to look bad.

"Careful!" cried out Tom. "Watch your men, fellows; close in. Wide awake now, every one. Take your time, Page. Watch the signal."

"Let's have the jitney," cried the Calixtus rooters. "Strike him out, Page, he can't hit. Stick to it, old man, we're all with you!"

"Three cheers for Bear Gulch!" cried a voice and they were given with a will. The "Doll" part was happily left out, for it would have been too valuable to the opposing rooters.

"I mustn't fail now," thought Oswald, "I've got to do it if I choke."

He felt like shouting out with the crowd, for he was excited. His heart was thumping, but he steadied himself. A look of resolution came into his eyes. Tom saw it, and hoped. He called for a hard one, and Oswald answered nobly.

"One strike," called Kennedy, and his voice betrayed that even he, the umpire, was interested.

The noise was deafening. The Richmond rooters were, to a man, aiming their remarks at Oswald. They flashed handkerchiefs and red flags to disconcert him, but he paid no heed.

"Two strikes," called the umpire, and he followed it up almost immediately with "Batter's out."

One out, one man on first; score, three to two. It was close, exciting, wonderful, thought Oswald. But he had been in tight places before, although of a different nature. He had stood in the public eye before, he had come out of a harder trial than this. He had claimed the attention of a thousand in Boston, and had quelled a tumult without the loss of a soul, while the smoke of a raging fire suffocated him. If he had not lost control of himself then, should he now? He decided not.

"This is mere child's play," he tried to tell

himself, but he knew better, and gritted his teeth for the finish.

The batter was waiting. He grew impatient, and taunted the player. Oswald smiled, and carefully dusted off his jersey. Almost with the same movement, he drove the ball toward the batter. It took him unaware, and he struck blindly. His bat met the ball, he hesitated, then, at the shouts of Fred Baldwin, began to run. The ball came almost in a straight line—Oswald's quick eye was on it, he jumped high, wound his glove around it, turned like lightning and drove it to first. As the rooters comprehended the double play, and that the game was over, they let forth a deafening shout. The players rushed in from the field, the mob surged around Oswald, they lifted him high on their shoulders, they carried him along with cheers and wild yells. Oswald Page, the gentle, quiet, girlish "Doll" was the baseball hero of the hour!

A few moments later Oswald sank down on a bench, exhausted.

"It was great, Tom, but it was hard. Oh, I'm so tired. Didn't I make a good beginning, 'Spider'?"

He leaned back and closed his eyes, a happy smile on his face. Tom and William looked at him in pride.

"Yes," murmured William in his ear, "you told me I'd change my mind, Oswald, and I have. You're a hero, and we're all proud of you."

"Tom," asked Oswald, "will you hail old

Keever out there and ask him if I've got a letter?"

At eight o'clock that night the torch-light procession was ready.

"Where's Page?" was the cry. "Page is the leader. Has any one seen Oswald?"

Nobody had. Where could he have hidden himself? He had not been seen since the game. A thought came to Tom, and he slipped away from the crowd. He entered the quiet little chapel. He heard a stifled sob. Yes, Oswald was there as he had feared, his face buried in his hands. He heard Tom coming and knew his step. Without raising his head, he gave him a short note. "Read it, Tom! And then please let me alone for a little while. Don't tell them I'm here. I can't face them." Tom read:

> "Where is my little fire-hero gone? I miss him. I never see the little hero of my dreams now. Come close to me and let me see you once again. I hear the bells, the firemen are yelling, the walls are crashing down—you are singing, but I cannot see you. I want you! Come to me, little fire-hero of my dreams."

That was all, but Tom put his arm around Oswald's neck. The noise of the torch-light procession could be heard growing fainter, but both boys knelt in silent prayer under the little red light of the sanctuary.

CHAPTER XI

A PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER

ACADEMY HILL, which leads from the little deserted station at South Baneville to Calixtus Academy, is a quiet country road. At the time of which I write, I believe there were only five houses between the station and the school, and three of these five were but a few minutes' walk from the railroad. The other two were midway, the nearest one to the college being at a distance of about half a mile.

On this particular day, a warm, April sun had converted the hill into a hot, dusty road, most uncomfortable to the unhappy pedestrian who was forced to climb it. "Jimmy" Hampton was this unlucky individual. Jimmy was dressed most remarkably—his hat might well have seen Civil War days, for it was old, torn, and gray from age and dust. His clothes were loose fitting and evidently were never made by Jimmy's tailor. The legs of the trousers were torn and ragged, and ended almost an inch above the ankles. His shoes were kept on his feet by means of cords which were tied around them, although they had originally been button shoes. Jimmy Hampton was a Knight of the Road, and seemed most unfortunate to-day. He was dispirited, downcast, and hungry.

A turn brought his weary legs to a stand-still,

for there, directly before him, stood a neat little farm-house. He seemed to take heart at the sight.

"I do believe my luck's comin' back!" he muttered. "I didn't know's there was any human habitation in this wilderness—but behold, I stand before a castle. 'Knock!' I tell myself—and suiting the action to the word, I knock."

He quickened his steps, and after satisfying himself that there were no dogs around, he entered the gate, approached the door—and knocked.

"Now, what'll it be this time?" he asked himself. "A sick kid, an aged mother, or just plain empty stomach?"

The door opened. A sharp featured, spectacled lady appeared, and threw up her hands in fright at sight of Jimmy.

"Now just a minute, madam," expostulated Jimmy Hampton, fearing she would close the door in his face. "I'm not the most savage being in the world, despite my unconventional appearance. It's merely a case of coffee and grub."

Another little shriek and the door was slammed in his face. A dog barked in the house. Jimmy Hampton turned quickly and hurried out of the yard. I'll not tell you what he said, for he was angry and not a very good man.

For a moment he trudged up the hill in silence. The sun had set and dusk was slowly falling. The poor beggar was indeed in misery, for he could see "slim chance of coffee and grub" after that

failure. There seemed to be no more houses in all Virginia.

"Well," he muttered and the whole tone of his voice was changed, "there's no use trying to play the square game. This world is full of crooked people and cross old women. I'm going to get something to eat, or some money to buy eats before this night is over if I have to scour all Virginia to do it, and rob the whole neighborhood in the bargain. It isn't in James Hampton, Esquire, to be a thief, but I've got to do it, that's all."

He crawled slowly up the hill. Occasionally he would sit on the roadside to rest and plan his next move. When he reached the little brook that flowed down from Tompkins' farm, he drank long and deep of its limpid waters. After a few hours' rest in the grass beside it, he arose again.

Darkness had settled down now. He stood a moment in hesitation. A bell sounded some distance away. He did not know that it was the bell which called the boys of Calixtus Academy to the chapel for night prayers. Whatever it might be, he decided to follow the sound, for where there is a bell ringing, there is some one to ring it, and that meant renewed hope to the tramp. He meant to increase his fortunes this night by fair means or by foul.

Ten minutes' walk brought him to the college grounds. The boys were silently walking from the chapel to their dormitories. Hampton did not allow himself to be seen; he stood behind the

great oak in front of the chapel, and after the last boy had passed out, he slipped through the door. Only one dim light was burning there, but one or two little fellows still lingered at their prayers.

Jimmy Hampton had never received a religious training. In fact he knew very little about God or religion—the Sacred Name he used occasionally, but not in prayer. And so now, as he slunk into a dark corner, no feeling of religious awe or fear entered his soul. He stood perfectly quiet until the last boy had departed and he heard the door locked behind him.

Then he sat down, still quite noiselessly. His mind was not clear as to why he was there. Some thought of gold and valuable loot entered his mind. He had heard of such things in churches. He wondered why that little red light was allowed to burn after all had departed, and he decided to keep very quiet, for perhaps some one might return to put it out. As his thoughts wandered on, he must have dozed, for suddenly he was awakened by a mysterious noise. He had presence of mind enough to keep quiet—perhaps it was some one returning. He listened intently. For a moment there was perfect silence. A long deep sigh sounded almost beside him. Then a faint little sob was stifled somewhere near him. It was uncanny. A chill passed through Jimmy Hampton's spine. He didn't just exactly believe in ghosts, he told himself, but he should have known better than to have come into a church at night. A loud creaking sound suddenly made

Jimmy hold his breath. Both fists were clenched in fear—but he remained silent. There was no sleep in his eyes now, and so he sat there, and each sound, however harmless it may have been, caused him to turn his head from one side or the other and peer nervously into the darkness. He felt as though he were not alone in that gloomy chapel, with its mysterious, shadowy light, and the feeling was most uncomfortable. He decided to brave it out for an hour or so, sit quiet, loot the place if he could, and escape through one of the windows.

* * *

The boys of Calixtus were in recreation. They were gathered in little groups discussing the great game of the day before. The advent of Oswald Page as a baseball player had been a surprise to all, and his strange conduct since the game was even more surprising. In fact, he had hardly been seen, he had hardly spoken a word to any one, since he had gained his crown of victory. During the day he had been asked to play ball. With big blue eyes he looked solemnly at the players, shook his head sadly, and walked off without a word. Billy Webb said he saw tears rolling down his cheeks. Something was wrong, and the boys were full of sympathy.

Tom Palmer alone could have explained, but he did not. Tom admired the courage of his friend, and he realized that the effort was costing too much. That little letter from his mother, which had been forwarded to Oswald by Mr.

Goselip, was the last drop to fill the little fellow's cup of misery. Even as he stood in the pitcher's box during that great game, and braved the Richmond Reds, his thoughts were of the little mother, and immediately after the game he had sought out the mail to see if good news had come. Good news had not, but that piteous letter had, and Oswald's heart grew heavy. He had only one consolation, the consolation of all faithful and practical Catholics. He went to the chapel, he read the letter to his hidden Saviour, he candidly and innocently asked the advice of Jesus. And he spoke also to the Queen of Martyrs, who would not fail to present his earnest petition to her Son.

During the day, Tom sought him out and tried to comfort him.

"You know, Oswald, we all have our little troubles. Yours is greater than most, but you must bear up under it like a man. You've been courageous so far. Don't get discouraged now."

"I'm not exactly discouraged, Tom, but when I think of the suffering of little mother, it almost breaks my heart."

"I know," Tom said quietly. "It is hard, but it is God's will, and He knows what's best. He must have some great and wonderful end in view, and soon everything will be all right. Come on out now, and play for awhile."

"No, Tom. Don't ask me to play to-day. I can't stand before the fellows, for they could read my trouble in my face. To-morrow I'll be

all right, but not now, Tom, please. Let me sit here alone, for I've got a plan in my head, and perhaps after all, everything will come out for the best."

"I'm sure everything will be all right, Oswald. Don't worry yourself sick again, for your mother wouldn't want that, you know."

"I'll take care of that, Tom. I owe that much to the little mother. Good-by till to-morrow, and I'll have good news then, I hope."

"Poor little hero," murmured Tom, to himself, as he went out into the yard. "I wish I could do something for him."

Night drew on and the boys assembled as usual for prayers. After all had left the chapel, Oswald remained behind unobserved, in the choir gallery. He heard Sam Dillon lock the door, and then he sighed in relief. He would spend the whole night there before the hidden Saviour, and he would storm that tabernacle door with prayers for his mother. The good and merciful Jesus could not turn a deaf ear to his cry. He would beg the Mother of Sorrows to pray with him. His faith was lively, and he felt quite confident that his sacrifice would be accepted and his mother cured.

There were all sorts of strange noises in the dark chapel that night. Once or twice he seemed to hear somebody stealthily moving about, again he seemed to hear some one breathing heavily—but no, it was the great stillness and the creaking of the benches. Strange shadows seemed to flit about the place, but they were caused by the

gentle swinging of the sanctuary lamp which was held suspended from the ceiling by a chain.

It was hard, all the same, to be there alone, and Oswald had to summon all his courage before he could put his mind on his prayers. Finally he decided to pray aloud—perhaps the sound of his own voice would reassure him. At the very first word, one of the benches let forth a loud creak, and it sounded as though some one moved. Oswald held his breath. Perfect silence reigned. He began again and this time he was uninterrupted.

"O sweet and merciful Jesus!" His gentle voice was clear and resounding in that quiet chapel. "I am going to stay with Thee all night, and watch with Thee, and every moment of the long hours, I am going to beg Thee again and again to cure my mother and end her darkness and her suffering.

"O tender Saviour, who didst suffer for me and for my mother, and for all mankind, and who didst die on the cross for us, Thou art with me. Thou art on the altar before me as truly as I am on my knees before Thee. I believe that Thou art here, and with the same true faith, I believe that Thou wilt hear my prayer.

"I am but a little child, and yet Thou wilt hear me, for Thou lovest the children. Was it not from the hands of a child that Thou didst take the loaves and the fishes to feed the multitude? Was not Thy sweet hands on the heads of the children again and again as Thou didst bless them and say, 'Suffer the little children to come to Me'?

I hope in Thee, I trust in Thee, for Thou lovest me. If I did not know that Thou art near me, I would be afraid to stay here in the dark alone. But I am not afraid when Thou art near.

"O Jesus, let me watch with Thee, as Thou didst watch in the garden of Gethsemane. Thou wert cold and sad and friendless then—the world did not love Thee, the world nailed Thee to the cross and crucified Thee, but Thou didst still love. And Thou didst cry from the cross, 'I thirst,' and Thy thirst was for our love. And Thou didst look down upon those who crucified Thee, and upon all sinners—and I, dear Jesus, am one—Thou didst look and say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

"O Jesus, cure my mother from her sickness. Perhaps if my voice were to return, and if I could sing once more as I sang in the mountain home on Gold Pot, when my mother called me her Lark, perhaps I could bring about my mother's cure by my song. It might stir up memories of the happy days of old, and then her mind would come back, and she would know me, and call me her Lark again.

"I will try now, O Saviour, for I believe Thou dost hear me, and will help me. And if I find I can sing again, I will know that Thou art about to cure my mother, and I will spend the rest of this sweet night in thanksgiving rather than in petition."

For a moment he remained silent. Had he not been so intent on his prayer, he would have heard a soft, low sobbing, for Jimmy Hampton, hidden

in the darkness below, heard that prayer, and his heart was touched.

O what a prayer was that! What a child must he be who could kneel here in the dark throughout the long hours of the night—here in the fearful dark, with its strange, uncanny noises—here in the dark alone—but no, not alone—had not he said that God was near? And he knew, indeed he must have known, for his very earnestness was such as to dispel all doubt. God then was present. God, who knows all things, even the secrets of the heart; God, who sees all things, even in the darkness of a chapel corner. Jimmy's tears began to flow as he thought of his own sinful soul, and compared it with the innocent soul of the boy who prayed so earnestly for his mother. In spite of all his efforts to remain undiscovered, he sobbed almost aloud.

Suddenly the boy ceased his prayer. A holy silence reigned in the dark chapel. And then that voice was raised once more, this time in song. What pure and perfect sweetness! Soft and low the voice continued, as though an angelic chorister had descended from heaven to make music for his God. Each word rose clear and distinct. Jimmy strained his ears to listen.

"God of mercy and compassion,
Look with pity down on me;
Father! Let me call Thee Father,
'Tis Thy child who sings to Thee.
Jesus, Lord, I ask for mercy,
Let me not implore in vain.
All my sins I now detest them,
Never will I sin again."

Ah, what a miracle of faith was here! Since the night when that sweet voice saved the lives of many, such a song had not been sung. And now, when the boy felt that no one listened but his God, he sang, and his voice returned in all its finest tones. He put deep feeling into every word, for he knew his prayer had been heard. In the darkness, he had risen to his feet, and his arms were stretched toward the hidden God. His voice grew soft and low, and died out in the darkness. Tears were in his eyes, tears of holy joy.

A deep sob broke the silence that followed. Jimmy Hampton, the would-be-thief, struck his breast in deep repentance as that earnest prayer reached his soul. Oh, if there were such guiltless souls to inhabit the world, how could there be room for him, a sinner and a thief? He sobbed aloud.

Oswald heard that sob. A feeling of fear crept over him. It was momentary only. He need fear no one who could cry, with such repentant voice:

"Oh God, have mercy on me! oh God have mercy on me—be my God."

A moment's silence, and the voice rose again.

"Little singer," cried Jimmy Hampton, "if you are not afraid of a sinner and a thief, come down here and whisper in my ear, and tell me—will your God be my God, too?"

"I am coming," eagerly cried Oswald as he began to comprehend the situation. In a moment he was beside the man, and he put his hand around that rough hand and squeezed it.

"I am very happy," he confided, "for God has heard my prayer, and has answered it. Let us sit here together in the dark, just you and I and God, and I will tell you all about Him and what He has done for me. But you must tell me who you are, and how you came here?"

"I am a sinner, little boy, and I came to rob your God," humbly replied the sobbing man. "I am afraid He will have nothing to do with me now."

"Yes, indeed He will!" answered Oswald. "Don't you know what He said to the sinner who was dying beside Him on the cross?"

Oswald told the story of the repentant thief, he told the story of the Crucifixion, he told of the Real Presence, and then was about to teach the repentant man to pray, when a noise was heard in the yard outside. Lights could be seen casting their shadows through the chapel windows, voices could be heard and they were drawing nearer.

"Ah!" whispered Jimmy Hampton, "I knew it! They're after me now. What'll I do? How can I get away, boy? They'll take me sure enough; me for the county waitin' parlors for six months!"

"Just you stay with me, Jimmy," answered Oswald. "They are friends of mine, and are looking for me. I'll explain about you and it will be all right. Don't you worry."

"I'll bet he's in the chapel, Father. Let us look there." It was Tom Palmer's voice.

"Yes, my son," answered Father Royce, "but

why is he not in bed? And why is he in the chapel?"

"He is a brave hero, Father," was Tom's only explanation.

A moment later the door opened, the lanterns flashed their light into the chapel—and the searchers saw the smiling face of Oswald Page gazing at them. He stood there with one arm about the arm of a stranger in ragged clothes.

"My son," asked Father Royce in surprise, "what does this mean? We have been looking for you. Why are you here at this time of night? Were you locked in? And who is this man with you?"

"God wished me to be here to-night, Father, for a double reason. Have you some news for me?"

"Why do you ask me that? Yes, I have a telegram for you. Read it." The telegram read:

"Come home at once. Mother is calling for her Lark. She is much better, and the doctor is hopeful.—Goselip."

Letter of Oswald Page to Thomas Palmer, dated three days later:

BOSTON, MASS., April 19, 19——.

DEAR TOM:

I'm the happiest "Doll" in the world. I knew it would be just as I wished and as you predicted. The good God did not fail me—blessed be His Holy Name forever! The very first song I sang to little mother was like a powerful medicine. She is better now, and getting strong. The doctor

says she is permanently cured. I know it is a miracle, but I am not surprised at that, for God is good. He not only heard my prayer, but he gave me Jimmy Hampton. Jimmy is a fine guide. He brought me to Boston without mishap and hurried me through the South Station in fine style. He is under instruction now, and will soon be baptized. Isn't it just too good to be true? Mr. Goselip lost his chauffeur last week, and Jimmy has been given the job. He is going to take little mother and me out for a ride in a few minutes.

I suppose you are wondering when you'll see me again. I can't leave little mother now, but don't be discouraged at that, for it won't be long before I see you. We are going to tour the South in Mr. Goselip's new Pierce Arrow next month. It's going to be a regular honeymoon, for Mr. Goselip asked mother if she wouldn't like to have him become my father, and of course mother let me answer. I answered. It is going to take place early in May. We are all happy.

Remember me to the boys, especially to "Spider" Webb and "Handsome" Hurley. I'll see you soon. Till then, good-bye.

Your friend,

THE DOLL FROM BEAR GULCH.

P. S.—Our automobile is the finest car in the world, but if you want to see something swell—drop a sponge in water.

OSWALD.

PART II

HOME

CHAPTER I

CALIXTUS BOYS ARRIVE

"MY son Oswald, you've been reading that book all morning. You will tire yourself. I believe there are tears in your eyes! What is the book, my Lark?"

"It is Samson Agonistas, mother. Have you read it?"

"Yes, long years ago. It was on the mountainside in the old days. I have not seen it since."

"Now, mother, do not begin to think of those days. You are not strong yet, and you must be careful. Do you know, it is just wonderful to read how Milton pictures out this tragedy of Samson. How nobly this strong and brave man offered up his life for his people! I could not help the tears, and somehow I kept thinking all the time of Tom Palmer. I don't know why."

"I am anxious to meet this friend of yours. Perhaps Tom is just the kind of a boy who would be as faithful to a friend as Samson was to his nation. Thomas Palmer must be a fine boy."

"Indeed he is, mother! You will like him, I am sure. He'll be here this afternoon and I can't wait till he comes."

"I am glad he is coming for your sake, my Lark; I hope he will stay with you all summer. Perhaps you can return to the academy with him in the fall."

"You must be good and strong before I leave you again, little mother. Oh, how I suffered in those days!"

"Let us not think of them now, my son, except to rejoice and thank God for His mercy. Is James about?"

"I believe he is at the garage, for he passed here a few minutes ago. I told him we would go to Back Bay at three, for I expect Tom on the Bay State Limited."

"Then you've done exactly what was in my mind to do. Let us go to luncheon, Oswald, and we will be ready to meet your friend."

Oswald Page had changed very little since he left Calixtus Academy two months before the events took place which we are giving you in this chapter. Perhaps there was a little more color in his cheeks, for his daily ride along the boulevard or in the parks, with lively Jimmy Hampton beside him, was indeed to his liking. His merry laugh often caused the passers-by to turn and look after the golden-headed boy almost lost in the cushions of the great automobile. Jimmy Hampton, former "knight of the road," found these trips the pleasantest part of his day's duties, and he never tired of telling his little charge, whom he loved with an ever growing affection, his past experiences. Oswald enjoyed the lively and humorous stories, and spent hours in Jimmy's company.

Much of Oswald's time, however, was given to his mother. Her miraculous cure was complete,

and no bad effects seemed to linger after her long and trying illness. Every day seemed to bring greater improvement and more strength. Yet Oswald felt somewhat anxious and he put in practice, as far as he could, the advice of the doctor that Mrs. Goselip's mind should be kept from lingering on the sad days that marked the end of their life on Gold Pot. Her new husband was indeed kind and lovable, doing all in his power for his wife, and trying day and night to make her happy and strong. Oswald felt delighted to think that he had gained a staunch friend in his new father.

* * *

The train was not a minute late. However, it seemed to Oswald Page as he waited and watched, that it would never come. At last the roar and the rumble announced the arrival of the Bay State Limited. A few minutes later the two boys were clasping hands and speaking so excitedly that they entirely forgot their surroundings, and would perhaps still be standing there if Jimmy Hampton had not brought them back to earth.

"Well, if you two young ones intend to take permanent quarters on the third step up, I may as well beat it and report a little lost child."

"Why, hello, Jimmy," cried Tom, "I didn't see you. How are you?"

"Far above par, Master Tom, and it does look good to see you two boys together again." As Jimmy spoke he squeezed Tom's hand till the

poor boy danced with pain. After which Jimmy apologized.

Soon they were speeding along, and once more the stream of questions flowed.

"Didn't the team come out fine, though?" asked Tom, who, you must remember, was captain of the Calixtus Academy baseball team.

"Only one defeat all season," marvelled Oswald. "How I wished I could get back and see the boys in action."

"And how often they've longed to see the 'Doll!' " laughed Tom. "The story of the game with the 'Richmond Reds' is still a new one, and must be told to all comers. That game put life into the whole team."

"Wasn't it bully, Tom? You surely did perform a baseball miracle to get me to throw a ball straight. I've been practising with Jimmy since I came home."

"Yes," piped back Jimmy from the chauffeur's seat. "And he got the hardest ball Reach would sell him and the thinnest glove, which latter was for me, and then he wanted me to cut out the palm of the glove the same as he had done with his."

"Oh, no, I didn't, Jimmy. I cut the palm of my glove because I didn't have to catch swift ones."

"Well, you sure did throw swift ones."

"Let's get up a team, Tom, and play some of the boys' teams around here."

"Nothing would suit me better, Os, but you

know William Webb, Frank Hurley and the others are not with us."

"Oh, we'll get a team all right. You wait and see what material I can find for you here in Brookline."

"I'm thinking we're going to have a fine time," chuckled Tom.

Further conversation was impossible now, for the boys had reached the Brookline home, and Tom was formally presented to Oswald's mother, who hurried out to the car to meet them. Tom was not a boy to hang his head or to twist his cap nervously in his hand on such occasions. Indeed he was so gentlemanly and manly that Mrs. Goselip was quite favorably impressed with this defender of her son.

Dinner was served almost immediately, so the talking had to be postponed once more, for all boys know that one can't talk business during such an important proceeding. Just as dinner was over, a telegram came for Oswald Page. It read:

"Meet me at Back Bay at 6:35. I'm afraid I'll get lost in a big city.—Spider."

"Hurrah, hurrah! Tom, 'Spider' Webb is coming in on the Knickerbocker! He'll be here in a few minutes. Wait till I tell Jimmy to get the car out. Isn't this luck? Now, how about a baseball team?"

"Flaming jack-knives, but that's great," cried Tom, falling back on his favorite expression in

his excitement. "I wonder why he didn't tell me he was coming?"

"I'm going to telegraph to Frank Hurley, and try to get him. Then we'll have a team that'll show up Boston. Come on, Tom, we'll be late for the train."

Sure enough, 6:35 and the Knickerbocker brought William Webb, with his usual twinkle and smile. After the first glad excitement, he explained that his father was on his way to Boston, for a two weeks' business stay, and he allowed William to precede him by a day. His father had secured a suite of rooms in the Lockhaven, which was in Brookline, two blocks from Oswald's home.

"Oh, if we can only get 'Handsome' Hurley," cried Oswald.

"He's in Pecowsic with his aunt," volunteered Webb.

"That's near enough to get him here. I believe Pecowsic is near Springfield, although I've never been there. We'll have some baseball team, Tom; you wait and see."

"Well, youngsters, what do you intend to do for the night? Going to sit in the tonneau of this car till I lock you in the garage? Come to earth. Baseball isn't the only thing in the world!"

"Say, Jimmy, we're too tired to do anything to-night. You think up a yarn or two, and we'll hunt you up in an hour and you do the spinning."

"So, I am to be the entertainment for the night, eh? Well, Master Oswald, if there is one

thing I like to do better than to run this gasoline eater, it's telling yarns. Just remind your friends that my yarns are not cotton nor wool—they're clean cut silk, and all true thread. Jimmy Hampton never tells what's not, he tells what is or was. Impress that on 'em, and I'll be your man."

Then Jimmy Hampton lighted a strong cigar in order to get his mind and imagination working.

"Are you there, Oswald?" The voice, deep and musical, came from the house.

"Yes, daddy, on my way!" cried Oswald eagerly and then, "Come on, fellows, Daddy Goselip is home! hurry up!"

"Well, boys," said Mr. Goselip, who was truly pleased to see the youngsters, "you are quite welcome, and I hope you will stay with us for the summer. And now, little Lark, I have news for you. I heard you speaking so much of baseball, that I took a hand in the matter myself. I have just received a letter from Father Royce and he says he'll be glad to do the little favor I asked of him. Six more of your friends from the Academy are coming tomorrow from the South. I don't recall their names, but Father Royce says most of them played on the team this year."

"Daddy Goselip, you're the finest ever! How did you think of that? Why, we'll have the time of our lives."

"My Lark, I owe you more than I can ever do for you. Yes, we'll have the time of our lives this summer if baseball can do it."

"I hear Jimmy outside, and I know he's all

primed up with that true story of his, so let's go out under the trees and hear what he has to say."

As the boys went out once more into the yard, the smile faded from Mr. Goselip's face. A troubled expression took its place.

"Ah, my little Lark," he muttered to himself, "I'd do anything for you, and I hope I can forestall this trouble for your sake, and the little mother's! It looks hard, though. Manager Dowd says the Eastern Troupe is apt to break any moment. And it is on them I have banked most of my success. And with seven weeks still to go, and all on guaranteed work! Well, I'll trust to the best, and in the meantime, I'll not let them know my money is in danger. That little golden-head! I must not let the pangs of poverty come near him again. Listen to him! God bless my little Lark. I'm sorry I placed all my capital in the silver mines; it's too much of a chance. What will happen if they fail—and then the Eastern Troupe—well, God is good. He'll not let my little Lark suffer."

CHAPTER II

THE KNIGHTLY NINE

JIMMY HAMPTON was in his glory. Here before him was an appreciative audience, so he prepared to do his best to entertain them while "sticking strictly to the truth." The boys lay about him on the grass and prepared for something good. So the story started:

"Well, you see, my lads, 'twas this way—and I speak the truth. Jimmy Hampton, your humble servant, didn't always wear a white shirt and have a shave regularly, nor did he always speak with his present tinge of Boston culture. There are records kept by certain public officials of certain cities, which picture in their brief way a slight resemblance to myself, and the explanation by which they refer to him is, 'Jimmy Hampton, Knight of the Road.' Which being my preface I enter chapter 2.

"Scene—A commodious side door Pullman, newly emptied of its stock of Armour's beef or Fairbank's soap, I forget which. Dramatis personae—half a dozen weary travelers nursing swollen feet and tightening their belts. The conversation, which was of dogs each had met in his travels at front doors was becoming dull—in fact, four of the five had already begun to doze, when I, being as it were the fifth of the five, albeit the first in rank, heard human sounds of interest.

Human voices, my lads, human voices, and they were loud and unguarded.

"'It can't be done, Luke. I say it can't be done.'

"'But the guarantee, my boy! If we don't play we lose not only the promised half of the gate receipts, but we forfeit our guarantee of fifty bucks.'

"'I know that well enough, but we can't play, I tell you. The man that leaves Beneville on the third of August forfeits more than fifty cold iron men. We can't get the players, and so that ball game must be called off, come what may.'

"'Well, don't do anything till the morning. I want time to think it over.'

"Then, my lads, the voices ceased and the steps died away in the distance. Now, I hardly knew what it was all about, but Jimmy Hampton didn't get his reputation as King of the Knightly Squad for want of finding out things. So I got my limbs in moving order and hiked after the plotters. They separated two blocks from the tracks and I followed the one that seemed to be the leader. He entered a decent sort of farmhouse off the main road of Beneville. I gave him time to get the cigars from the family safe. Then I brushed my coat, straightened my red necktie, which I had bought that very day at the Five and Ten, and gently rang the bell. His highness opened the door.

"'Pardon me, Mr. Billington, I believe?'

"'The same,' he answered coldly. 'But I fear

my memory will not serve me so accurately in recalling your name.'

" 'The records announce me as Jimmy Hampton, Esquire,' I replied.

" 'And your business, Mr. Hampton?'

" 'Can best be settled in a comfortable rocker,' I answered.

"Mr. Billington (I had learned his name, for it was printed on the door) hesitated a moment, and then said, 'Come in.'

"I entered and sure enough, there were the cigars right on the table. 'Which reminds me,' I said, helping myself to a cigar, a match and an easy chair, 'I have not enjoyed my after dinner smoke, owing to this pressing business call.'

"Mr. Billington scowled, but he managed to hold his temper. I blew a few rings, and I don't mind saying I can blow pretty good rings when I'm biting a decent one.

"Not wishing to put my host's patience to too severe a test (there might be a dog around, you know), I started in presently to state my business.

" 'I came to speak to you about the game on August third,' I started.

"That hit Billington right where I wanted him, so he sat up and began to take notice.

" 'Are you from Applegate?' he asked, and I know he feared I'd say I was the rival manager.

" 'No,' I replied easily, 'but I'm willing to be if there's a side-door Pullman scheduled for the village to-night.'

" 'Come then, what's your business? I've got other affairs to attend to than entertaining tramps.'

" 'Wrong, Billington,' I answered. 'Your most pressing business to-night is to save that fifty dollars guarantee and enjoy a few dollars of the gate receipts.'

" 'What do you mean, man?'

" 'Simply this, mine host, and while we're on the subject I might suggest that you get a humidor for your cigars; it keeps them moist, you know. Well, I've an aggregation that can put a few stunts over in ball playing in a pinch, and as my stars have an off day for August third, I think maybe they might condescend to meet the Applegate fans, and represent Beneville for a victory. Guarantee saved, reputation made—for we're hummers on the diamond—August third at home, and all's well that ends well, as F. Bacon used to say to his old friend, J. Johnson.'

" 'Do you mean to say,' asked the honorable Mr. Billington, and he was interested now, 'that you can guarantee a team to take our place on August third and play the game?'

" 'With proper inducements, my friend, I can guarantee all but victory—my native modesty will allow me merely to hint at that.'

" 'What team can you get and what inducements do you require?'

" 'The team is composed of an all star cast temporarily on the rocks owing to the hard times. It is known as the Knightly Nine. The induce-

ments are simple—you furnish the suits—split the fifty bones, split your portion of the receipts —and we do the rest.'

"'How do I know you'll do this?'

"'What's the joke, partner? Do you suppose I'm talking for exercise? Who loses most, you or I? Simply sign a guarantee that you'll split the fifty and the receipts when I return the suits and I'll guarantee the rest. And by the way, you needn't send that telegram in the morning.'

"Well, boys, I won out, and when I returned to that Pullman with a ball, a stick and an old glove, the boys thought I was doting. It took a half hour's display of oratory that would put a master to shame to convince them, but I won out with them too, and the next day I had them in the field limbering up their arms. Food was plentiful in Beneville the next few days, for the word went around quietly that the Knightly Nine were to be well treated until after the third. There were only five of us to begin with, but the next freight brought two more and the following day filled up the list.

"I'd just love to tell you about that game in Applegate. It was a circus. We were all togged out in Beneville's best suits, and we made some appearance. We gained sixteen points to begin with by striking terror into our opponents.

"'Be there any ringers among ye?' asked old Squire Donkey Ears, who seemed to be the chief cook and laundry scrub of the Applegate fair.

"'Not that I know of,' answered Captain

Jimmy Hampton, 'except we're here to wring a victory out of the gosh darned best team in all Ohio, if ye kin show it to us. Are you filled with ringers?'

"That notable sniffed in scorn at such a counter charge, and murmured, 'Ye sure do be a husky bunch, but I guess ye'll do.'

" 'That's what we're here for, Mr. Whiskers, and the Applegate Stars are the first we'll do.'

"Then the game began. How those fellows played ball! They might have known how to pitch hay, but they couldn't pitch the slender sphere; they might have known how to swing the scythe, but they couldn't swing the bat; they might have known how to size up a potato patch, but they didn't know how to size up a ball player. They might have known enough to run to the hay field when a storm was threatening to mar a fair day, but they didn't know enough to run to first base when they hit a fair ball.

"We surely would 'a'won that game eighty-six to nothing if old 'Bones' McCabe hadn't broken into the limelight with a brilliant kick on one of the umpire's many raw decisions. 'Bones' got up to bat, booted an infield chance with two on, a double steal followed, with Bones safe on first. The score was then twenty-six to nothing. But that gosh darned umpire, Uriah Squash-heap, calmly turned his thumb down, and motioned McCabe out for running beyond the first base line. Three down and the runs not to count. That got *Bones sore, for* he'd bet 'Lefty' Blake the final

score'd be over thirty. So he strode with two clinched fists sawing the air, up to the umpire. We trailed after him, begging him to calm himself, but he wouldn't listen to reason.

"'Ye empty lump o' raw lead,' he yelled and flourished his fist, 'what kind o' ball-playin' do ye think this is? We can stand bein' robbed, but we're not kittens. Yer blamed old team is no good anyhow! We can beat 'em with hands and feet tied to our necks! Ye're all like gas-meters, ye're always found in the cellar. If ye can't use the elevator decently ye try to rob the whole department. If ye ever had a man on third base I suppose ye'd hire another brass band and use a three-inch head-liner in an extra edition o' yer Bee Hive Weekly. Ye don't know what honest baseball is, ye low down, cheatin', good fer nothin' cabbage eaters! Come on and fight if ye can't act like a decent sort of an empire!"

"I guess Bones had been treated too well at Beneville the past few days, but he didn't just reckon right when he dared all Applegate. The umpire peeled off his coat, danced around like an Indian, then gave the high sign to the waiting bleachers. To a man they trooped down, hay stickin' out all over 'em, but they had fight in their eyes. Bones landed the umpire a clean upper and floored him. That maddened the crowd and before we could get fairly started, the whole county fair was after us. I took command. We formed a phalanx and dared the crowd. It was fight and fight hard fer three-quarters of an hour.

I had a black eye and the others were somewhat similarly decorated, but we stuck close. It seemed like a day that thing went on. I guess the sun must 'a'got interested and stood still as it did once before to watch a fight. Finally I saw that, though our phalanx was invulnerable if no guns appeared and stones weren't thought of, we might fight till we got exhausted and then have to give up. So I told 'Baldy' Biggs to pass the word around to let me slip through, for I'd a plan in my head. It worked too. Everybody was so interested smashing the nearest man to him that I slipped away unnoticed. I made for the ticket office. Sure enough, it was deserted and the cash was right there. I took our half—it wasn't stealing, for it was ours according to contract. Then I loped around to where the farmers had their teams hitched, got the best lookin' horses untied and ready fer the road. Then I gave the signal to the rest—three hoots, something like the sound of an automobile Klaxon. Then you should have seen the change. Our gang just turned and swung into those wagons like fancy circus performers and in a few minutes we were beyond all pursuit, for we'd taken them all off their guard. After getting a good start we turned the horses loose and started them back towards the fair grounds, and we hiked the rest of the way to Beneville. We was all pretty sore on McCabe, but we were happy and inclined to forgive him when we thought of the gate receipts safely tucked away *in my pocket.*

"I went in to the Honorable Billington that night, told him we won in an easy game by the score of 26 to 6. Got a little sympathy for the bad crack I got on the eye from a foul ball, returned the suits, shared up, and then we all beat it for parts unknown.

"I guess there's still rather hard feelings between Applegate and Beneville, but I'm sure the Knightly Nine were not to blame. We played a square game and won a good victory. We won our game, filled our contract, got the money and then disbanded. No, the Knightly Nine haven't played a game since, but if you boys get up a pretty good team, and want to see real science in baseball, come around and perhaps we may form for the occasion. Mind you, I won't make any rash promises, though."

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE WATCHMAN

IT was night. William Webb and Thomas Palmer lay in calm repose, for they were tired after the day's travel. A half smile played about "Spider's" face as he slept—perhaps he was dreaming of the adventures of the Knightly Nine. Tom breathed steadily, in perfect, peaceful sleep.

Oswald Page, whose room was next to the one occupied by his guests, lay awake, his head propped up with pillows. Somehow, although he too, was tired, sleep refused to come to close his eyes. Troubled thoughts persisted in coming to his mind. What could it all mean, anyway? He certainly had grown fond of his new father. He loved him with a passionate love, and he could not bear the thought that he was in trouble. To-day, however, he had noticed the deep furrows of thought on "Daddy" Goselip's brow, and he had watched his face grow white when he read the telegram brought to him at dinner. And then Oswald could not help overhearing what was said over the telephone. Mr. Goselip had said something about the Eastern Troupe. He said if that, along with the silver mines, was to fail him, he would be ruined.

Oswald's eyes refused to close. He could not *understand* what it meant, but he felt convinced

that Daddy Goselip was in trouble. Finally he got out of bed, and in his pajamas, started for the room of his new father. He knew the way perfectly and so he had no need of a light. He would go to Daddy's room and ask him what it all meant. If it was about money, then Oswald knew he could help, for had he not said to his mother on the mountain-side, "I'm the man of the house now," and had proved it. He could do it again if necessary. He knew his voice was as strong and sweet as ever and he had not forgotten the little songs that so pleased the theatrical world a short time ago. He knew the world would rejoice at the reappearance of the "Golden Lark." Anyhow, if Daddy Goselip was in trouble, Oswald must know it and cheer him.

Suddenly the chimes in the lower hall pealed out. Oswald started in fear. But it was nothing—the clock struck twelve.

The door of his father's room was soon reached. The moon peeped in through the open window and shed its peaceful rays on the sleeper. Yes, Mr. Goselip was sleeping. Oswald looked down for a moment in love at the good man. He must not disturb him to-night. To-morrow would be soon enough. He started once more for the door, but then the sleeper moved restlessly, and Oswald, thinking he was about to wake, remained at the bedside. The lips of the speaker moved. He was dreaming.

"They shall never go back to Gold Pot," he

murmured. "They are too good! The silver mines, you say? Failed?"

A long, drawn out sigh.

Then, "But the Eastern Troupe will hold together . . . no, no! not they!" Another sigh came from the troubled sleeper, he moved restlessly, and then became quiet.

Oswald turned away slowly. A tear was in his eye as he softly closed the door. Quietly he began to return to his own room. He would try to sleep now, and on the morrow he would give his daddy a plan that would make things come out all right. He was about to re-enter his room when a peculiar, grating noise struck his ears.

What could it be? Surely no one was awake and moving about the house at such an hour. Perhaps he just imagined the noise; it may have been —but no, there it was again! Oswald would have cried aloud this time in fear, but his voice refused to come. Could it be burglars? It must be, for who else would make such stealthy sounds at one o'clock in the morning?

Suddenly a half smothered thud was heard, as though some one had fallen against a chair. A muttered oath followed, a flash of light, then all was still again.

Slowly Oswald crept toward the sound. It was not courage that spurred him on, but some subtle magnetism that seemed to call him to the danger zone. Onward he crept, noiselessly, slowly. Down through the inky darkness, down the heavily car-

peted stairs. He was white with fear. The bottom step creaked.

"Who's there?" the harsh voice came from the darkness, and then that same little flash of light appeared. This time, however, it did not die out, but turned to the stairs and focused a little circle on the watchman in pajamas.

"Huh! a kid!" came a voice from the darkness behind the strip of light. "Don't you move, or make a sound, or I'll put my hands around your throat and choke your life out!"

What a horrible whisper! If Oswald could only see the man. Surely, surely he must be dreaming all this!

Unconsciously he crept on till he was near the center table, the little light following him. No more words came from the darkness in spite of this disregard of orders. Perhaps the intruder thought the little fellow was walking in his sleep, for Oswald had not uttered a sound.

Finally, however, Oswald's voice returned, and with it the fear that his mother would be awakened, and the shock bring on her past illness.

"Don't make much noise, Mr. Burglar. You'll wake my mother."

A smothered chuckle came from the darkness.

"Don't worry, Master Night Watchman. Just be quiet, and I'll promise not to wake up any one. But no tricks, now, or your life won't be worth much."

"What are you doing?" asked Oswald.

"Doing!" the harsh voice chuckled once more.

"It's raining so hard out I came in for an umbrella."

"Oh, it's not raining! I saw the moon," whispered the boy.

"That's it, kid! I was moonstruck, and was beginning to get loony, so I just helped myself. But what am I going to do with you? I hate to hurt such a little kid."

Of a truth, the burglar was puzzled, for his purpose was loot and not murder. He had never harmed any one in his life, and he could not begin now on this golden-headed boy in pink pajamas.

"Let's turn on the light and have a chat," prompted the boy, his self-possession slowly reasserting itself.

"None of that, kid; hands off any lights, or it'll be the last light you'll ever peep at. And if you dare make a sound, I'll brain ye, sure as my name's 'Bones.'"

"I'm not afraid," answered Oswald, who was at last working his mind shrewdly to extricate himself from this position. "I hope you won't knock over any more chairs for I'm afraid my mother will wake up. And she's been sick."

"Has she?" asked the darkness, in mock sympathy. "Far be it from me to disturb her nocturnal slumbers. Who else is in this house?"

"There's Tom Palmer, who was captain of Calixtus this last year, and 'Spider' Webb, and Daddy Goselip, and Jimmy Hampton, who——"

"*Jimmy* who? You don't mean to tell me that

Jimmy Hampton, the 'King of the Knights' is here in this swell joint?"

"I hope you're a friend of Jimmy's. If you are you can't do anything bad."

"Huh, I can't, eh? Well, let a squeal out of your pretty throat and see!"

"Don't worry about me squealing; I'm not the least bit afraid. And besides, I know who you are, anyway."

A sudden inspiration had come to Oswald. He remembered Jimmy's stories very well, and one was about a daring "second-story" man, "Bones" McCabe, also famous for his part in the great game of the "Knightly Nine." Had not this man himself said his name was "Bones"?

"How could you know who I am? Ye can't even see me."

"I'd love to see you, though. There's nobody in this part of the house. Let me turn on the lights. Nobody will know, and I promise you I'll keep quiet."

Silence reigned for a moment. The burglar realized he could not leave the youngster at large and then go about looking for the papers he had promised to get, but it was hard to make up his mind to give the little fellow a "knock-out." Perhaps with light, he might be able to do his work at the safe, and keep his eye on the boy, too. Perhaps, too, he might get one of the drugs ready, and put the child to sleep for a while. He would need light to do that, for he realized the danger of drugs in the hands of an inexperienced man, and

he did not want to do any real harm to the little fellow.

"I'd love to see a burglar," again spoke Oswald, feeling that the decision was being weighed.

"Will ye promise not to raise any racket?" asked the darkness.

For answer, Oswald made a quick move; the electric lights flashed brilliantly. Quickly he pulled down the curtain.

For a moment the burglar started in alarm, but as everything remained quiet, he chuckled at the little fellow's promptness in pulling down the curtain. It was just what he wanted, for the night policeman might be passing any minute.

"Now, kid, take a good squint at me. If ye can tell who I am in spite of this mask, I'll promise not to hurt you even if I do have to put ye to sleep for a while. I can't waste the whole night with you."

"Remember your promise, then. And I'm not going to guess, either," triumphantly whispered Oswald, who, from Jimmy's description of the long-legged "Bones," was sure he had the right man. "Do you remember the great game you had with Beneville and the fight you had with the farmers, Mr. Bones McCabe?"

"D——!" muttered the man, and Oswald laughed. "Tell me, kid, how it comes ye know me, and how comes it Jimmy Hampton is around these diggin's?"

"Oh, Mr. McCabe, it's too long a story to tell, *but if you're* a friend of Jimmy's, you'd better

not do any 'second-story' work in this house. Jimmy's King here now, and he'd tear your eyes out if you harmed any one here, or took anything away."

This was ill-spoken on the part of Oswald, for it made the man nervous. What if some one woke up and found him before he got the papers?

"I'll have somethin' to say about that," he growled.

"I didn't mean any harm," meekly answered Oswald, "but I know poor Daddy Goselip is worrying over the loss of the silver mines. Please don't try to open the safe, Mr. McCabe."

"I've had about all the fooling from you that I'll stand. I hate to hurt that curly head, but—well, I guess you better tell me how to open this safe."

The man's words were subdued again, but they contained an ominous threat.

What if Jimmy Hampton himself came and spoiled it all? Jimmy would not understand. At last, after shifting about for several minutes, his keen eyes pierced the bright eyes of the plucky little lad who was so effectually delaying his work. The fearless little watchman bore the gaze and at the same time was planning to get rid of the thief without allowing Daddy Goselip to suffer any loss. Finally the man spoke and his tone was ugly now.

"I'll stick to my promise, kid, as long as you don't make any fuss. But if you make one sound or one suspicious move, I'll brain you. Now,

what's the combination of this safe? It'll save time and trouble to tell me, and the sooner I'm through, the sooner I'll let you go to bed. The stock of the silver mines must be there," he spoke this last aloud, seeming to forget that his words were heard by Oswald.

"The silver mines have failed," answered Oswald, "and the stock is no good now."

"Silence, you little fool!" almost roared the man, forgetting in his anger that they were not alone in the house. "Another word like that from you, and I'll floor you!"

"Well, I won't tell you the combination just the same," pluckily answered Oswald, "and if you try to open that safe, I'll yell."

"So that's your game, is it?" hissed the thief. "Well, we'll take care of you."

He made one cat-like spring for the boy, but he landed far differently than he expected.

"No, you don't, 'Bones' McCabe," said a new voice, and the voice came from Jimmy Hampton, into whose very arms the angry man had sprung.

The struggle was brief, if struggle you could call it, for Jimmy stepped back quickly and pointed an ugly-looking gun at McCabe's head. The burglar did not move.

As soon as Oswald could get his breath he cried, "Jimmy, don't, please don't shoot! you'll wake mother!"

"Don't worry, Doll," reassured the King of the Knightly Squad, "There'll be no shooting tonight." Then putting away the ugly gun, he

laughed softly and with outstretched hand, said, "Shake, 'Bones,' old pal. I'm glad to see you. I thought it sounded like your savage snarl, so I came to investigate—looking up old friends, as it were."

The baffled burglar said nothing aloud, but he muttered something that sounded much worse than the adjective Oswald first heard him use. However, he shook the offered hand, though rather gingerly.

"Now, Oswald, run back to bed and try to sleep. Let me handle this fellow, for he's good at heart, in spite of all he's said. Don't worry. I'll see that all is safe. Try to sleep."

"He said something about the silver mines, Jimmy, and Daddy Goselip is worrying about them. Do you think——"

"Run along! Jimmy Hampton is thinking a lot to-night. The silver mines, eh? So that's the game. I thought as much. If I were you I'd say nothing just yet to Daddy Goselip about this night's fun. Everything will come out all right in the end, and you and I will save—even the silver mines."

Slowly Oswald backed up the steps. Then the lights went out and the two men, arm in arm, went to Jimmy Hampton's room. The last Oswald heard was a smothered laugh from Jimmy—a sort of pleased chuckle.

It was long before the little fellow closed his eyes in sleep, for the night's adventures were strange.

What could it all mean? Why was Jimmy so friendly to the burglar? But Jimmy was true blue, and so everything must come out all right under his guidance—yes, even the silver mines would be saved. Didn't he say so himself?

At last, the little boy, exhausted from the trying adventure of the night, slept in peace. In Jimmy's quarters, however, there was no more sleep, for a council was held. At first, it almost proved a stormy affair, for "Bones" McCabe did not seem to like the proposition of the King. The final result, however, seemed satisfactory to both, for once more they shook hands, and this time the grip was a hearty one. Then they parted, the burglar going without further opposition.

CHAPTER IV

THE MORNING AFTER

"WELL, Nightbird, you have dark circles under your eyes this morning."

"Oh, Jimmy, tell me, what did you do with him?"

"Do? Why I shook hands and told him to call again."

"But he tried to rob Daddy Goselip, Jimmy! How could you do that? He might come again."

"Don't worry. You did Daddy Goselip a greater service last night than you imagine. 'Bones' McCabe is no ordinary burglar. I suppose I could have turned him over to the police, but he's not a bad fellow—and even if I did we would be open to fresh attacks. I'm thinking I took the better plan."

"I can't understand it, Jimmy. If we locked him up in jail, how could he come again?"

"He wouldn't come again, but some one else might. You see 'Bones' is merely a tool in the hands of some rascal. It's all about the silver mines, but between you and me, Doll, we'll save the mines and we'll save more than that. For today, though, don't let any one know of last night's adventure. Get the boys together this morning and form your team. Just enjoy yourself and don't worry."

"I'll try not to worry, Jimmy, but things seem

so strange lately. I hope everything will be all right."

"Everything *will* be all right, Oswald. But if I do something that may seem strange, and if others judge me rashly, just remember, Oswald, that Jimmy Hampton is true blue."

"I know you are, Jimmy. I couldn't doubt you, and I know Daddy Goselip couldn't either."

"Maybe not, Oswald. But even if he were to doubt me, I'll be satisfied if you remain faithful to me. You made a man of me, you know, and all I do now, and whatever I may suffer, is for you. But run along! Here comes that boisterous 'Spider'!"

"Hello, Os! I've been looking all over for you. My, but you look like a funeral. What's up?"

"The sun—up two hours ago," smiled Oswald, trying to hide his inner feelings.

"That's better." "Spider" seemed to breathe easier, now that his first suspicion seemed to be unfounded. "But just think, Os, I've almost had a fight this morning, and it isn't nine o'clock yet."

"A fight, 'Spider'! With whom?"

"With that little white-face who lives down the street in the end house."

"You mean Harold Oakley, I guess. He's manager and captain of the Brookline Radiants. We'll get a whack at them soon, I hope."

"What! Play ball with him? I guess not!"

"Tell me how you met him and what was the *trouble?*"

Oswald was laughing now, for he knew that

William Webb could hardly make friends with Harold Oakley.

"I woke up early this morning, and I couldn't sleep, so I got up and went to Mass. I know where the church is, for I saw it yesterday when we came from the train. On my way back, this —this kid was swinging on his gate. He didn't pay any attention to me and I guess he thought I should walk in the gutter to give him room to swing—but I didn't. I just let the gate slam into me, and little Percival, or whatever his name is, went sprawling on the sidewalk. I guess he isn't a Catholic because he began to use some pretty strong language. You know, I made a resolution not to fight any more, but when he called me those names, they smashed all my resolutions and, and——"

"And what?" asked Oswald, laughing.

"And Harold Oakley's face," answered "Spider." "After I knocked him down and sat on him, I began to think that it wasn't quite right —just coming from Mass, you know. So I held him a minute and gave him a little advice and a warning. He blubbered like a baby and then when I let him up, he ran into the house to tell his mother and have her kiss the sore spots. I could hardly keep from calling him names, so I hurried back. You don't mean to tell me he can play ball?"

"Well, not very good," laughed Oswald, "but his father is a rich broker, who has an office in Wall Street, in New York. He comes up here for

the summer. Harold has lots of money, so the other boys elected him captain, thinking he'd buy bats and things."

"If that's the kind of a team we have to meet, we needn't train much."

"Oh, but the other boys can play! You just wait and see. Have you seen Harold's father?"

"No. If he looks anything like Harold, I don't want to."

"He doesn't, though. He's got a small, black mustache and the whitest teeth you ever saw. And there's a whole lot of gold in them. He's always smiling. I don't like him—he makes me nervous. His eyes are small and dark, and seem to pierce right through you when you're not looking at him, but if you look straight at him, he turns them away."

"Os, I do believe you're describing that man who is coming up to the gate now. See, he's looking this way, and there's as evil a grin on his face as it has been my misfortune to see in many a day."

"Yes, sure enough, that's he. I'm afraid every time I see him coming, for I think he means harm to my father. I wonder what he's after."

Oswald Page could not understand why it was, but for some reason, he felt that Mr. Oakley and "Bones" McCabe were in the same class, and that both were plotting against his father. A foolish thought, doubtless, but he could not banish it, and he meant to find out, for if Jimmy Hamp-

ton and Oswald Page were to save Daddy Goselip from ruin, then both should know the business that brought Mr. Oakley to the house in broad daylight as well as the business of "Bones" McCabe, who came by night.

"I say, 'Spider,' will you round up Tom Palmer and the others, and get them down behind the garage? I'll be there in a little while. We'll have to get our team in working order as soon as we can."

"Right you are, Doll. It won't take me many minutes, for I think I know where they are."

Oswald, however, did not even hear, for he had already started on a run for the house. Going in through the side door, he hurried to the big sitting-room, which was really Mr. Goselip's study. Quickly he hid himself in the far corner, behind the great desk. He felt rather doubtful at first, whether or not he was doing right, but realizing that he was acting for his daddy's welfare he did not hesitate.

He had only a moment to wait; the voices of the men were audible even before he was well hidden.

"Yes, sir! I bring you good news from the market, Goselip, good news!"

"In relation to the silver mines, I hope?"

"Yes, I find your silver mines are giving us much trouble, but I think we'll win out in the fight. You bought them at twenty from a man by the name of Rhoakes, I believe?"

"Yes, at twenty. I knew the locality pretty well, for I had been out there three years ago. I do believe yet there's silver in those mines."

"I am afraid you're mistaken, Goselip. I have the authority of my own experts that the yield from the Gold Pot Mines will be far less than even the construction expenses of machinery. The stock to-day, as you know, is worthless in the market. But I have an offer for you that I am sure will please you. Rhoakes is a peculiar sort of a character. He telegraphed me this morning that he is willing to buy the stock at the same figure at which he sold. Has qualms of conscience, I believe, for he knew they were worthless when he sold. He intends to take all the stock back at the figure at which he unloaded, then settle down on it himself and in a quiet manner try to get from it a yield sufficient to keep him alive. He'll never get rich on Gold Pot rock," laughed the broker.

"His offer, you say, is to buy back the stock at twenty?" Mr. Goselip was lost in thought a moment. Yesterday he was convinced that the silver mine stock was useless, but here he had an offer for them which at least would avert the threatened ruin and save his wife and Oswald. Surely it was a chance not to be lost.

A small, uniformed boy at that minute made his appearance at the front gate. Mr. Goselip saw him, and recognizing the uniform of the Western Union, excused himself and went to the outer door for the message.

When Oakley found himself alone, he rubbed

his hands together and smiled in triumph, for he knew the contents of that telegram. It had come at an opportune moment, as he had anticipated.

"It will be all right, I'm thinking, in spite of the bone-head, McCabe." He spoke his thoughts aloud. "If he got them last night, I wouldn't have to pay even the twenty. But then, each is worth many times that to——"

Mr. Goselip was heard returning, so the broker stopped. Oswald was almost in a panic. He must not let the sale go on until those words were explained. But the time to act had not yet come.

"Not bad news, I hope?" the broker's sharp eyes were rivetted on the face of the other.

Mr. Goselip forced a smile, for he did not feel it necessary to divulge his business. "It might be worse—but it is hardly to my liking. Have a cigar? They are my own brand, you know."

"Thank you, I'll smoke a cigarette with your permission. I'm a light smoker before dinner."

"As you will. But to return. I see no reason why I should not accept Mr. Rhoakes' offer. For me, the stock, under the circumstances, is not worth the paper it is written on, and Rhoakes knew this when he sold. It may be worth something to him, if he works the claim himself. I'm half inclined to think the silver is there—but I cannot take the chance at present, for my other investments depend somewhat on this one."

Oakley smiled. He knew the Eastern Troupe was Goselip's greatest venture outside of the silver mines, and did not that little yellow telegram

just now convey the information that the troupe would disband within a few hours? It was a lie, of course, but how should Goselip know that?

"Your decision is a wise one. If you wish, we will settle the little affair at once. Rhoakes, as I say, is a peculiar chap, and he plainly stated that the offer would last only for one day."

"One day is long enough, Oakley, and I feel indebted to you for your kindness in so promptly bringing the matter to my notice—"

"Not at all, my dear sir, not at all. It is merely a friendly bit of business!"

"Well, let me get the stock. It is in this safe here. We may as well close the deal, for the silver stock has caused me trouble enough."

Oswald, in his hiding place, dared to lift his head, and what he saw confirmed his suspicions of the broker, for Oakley's eyes were almost bulging from his head as he tried to watch Daddy Goselip close enough to gain the combination of the safe.

Mr. Goselip threw open the door. He bent down to take the papers from the little pigeon hole in which he had placed them. He had thought, when he had so carefully put them there, that they were more valuable than pure gold, but now—

Suddenly he straightened up. He grasped the side of the safe to keep from falling. His face went deathly white. Slowly, as one in a daze, he passed his hand over his forehead.

Oswald, forgetting himself, rushed from his

hiding place and hurried to the dazed man's side. It was not noticed in the excitement of the moment that Oswald had come from behind the desk.

"What's the matter, daddy? What is wrong?" Oswald's voice thrilled with excitement.

Slowly, Mr. Goselip looked around the room, then bent over the safe once more. After this second more careful examination, he rose up, his face sternly set; he was himself again.

"I fear, Mr. Oakley, we will have to postpone the settlement of this case for a little while. The silver mine stock has been stolen!"

"Stolen! It cannot be, sir! He told me he had fai—"

Mr. Oakley caught himself just in time. He bit his lip and cursed himself under his breath for a fool. Plainly there was something wrong. "Bones" McCabe had reported failure—and yet the stock was stolen. He looked at the open door of the safe; he looked into the puzzled and despairing face of Mr. Goselip; he looked into the face of Oswald Page, and he blushed a dark crimson, for the eyes of Oswald held an accusing gaze. Once more he swore under his breath, and this time the little blue-eyed boy was the subject of his malediction.

Finally, Mr. Goselip broke the oppressive silence. "Good-day, Mr. Oakley, I will confer with you later on this matter. For the present I will see what can be done!"

Crestfallen and disappointed, the broker picked up his hat and withdrew in silence.

Oswald's arm stole about his father's neck. "Do not worry, daddy," he said, "I know what it's all about, and I can help. I'm afraid of that man, daddy. He wishes you harm."

"Tut, tut, Lark! Even now he offered to save me from ruin. Ruin—it stares me in the face indeed."

"Now daddy, don't speak like that, you still have me, and you know I've helped before."

"Yes, Lark, you've helped before. But I'll not think of putting you through such a terrible ordeal again. Run along and tell Jimmy to bring the car to the door."

After a tender hug and a kiss, Oswald sprang to obey. He would tell his father about the conduct of Oakley later for he knew that the broker was plotting some evil.

Out in front of the garage, he met the other boys, who were impatiently awaiting him. Jimmy was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's Jimmy, Tom? Have you seen him?"

"I haven't seen him all day," replied Tom.

"Why, he's gone away! Didn't you know that?" asked William Webb. "After you left me and went into the house, I saw Jimmy with a suitcase. 'Are you going away, Jimmy?' I asked. 'Not for very long,' he answered, and ran off for the trolley before I had a chance to ask him anything else."

Strange thoughts surged through Oswald's mind. Jimmy Hampton gone, the silver mine stock missing. Jimmy had shaken hands with

"Bones" McCabe last night. And did they not both laugh, as he went back to bed, leaving his father's safe unguarded? Why did not Jimmy give the word to the police and have the robber locked up? Why did Jimmy make Oswald promise not to mention last night's attempted robbery? And now—the mining stock is gone, "Bones" McCabe is gone, and Jimmy Hampton is gone. It was all plain enough—"Bones" McCabe and Jimmy Hampton were both—

But no, how could he say that? Jimmy was true blue. Jimmy was honest and upright. Jimmy knew what was best, and he was trying to save Oswald and his father. Had he not promised only an hour ago not to doubt him? Oh, it was hard, though, hard to stick to that promise in the face of all he knew. Oswald excused himself to the puzzled boys and returned to the house.

"I promised I'd not think ill of him, and I won't," he said to himself resolutely. "Jimmy Hampton's true blue and you know it, Oswald Page."

"Well, Oswald, why doesn't Jimmy come?" Mr. Goselip had his coat and was impatiently walking up and down the veranda.

"He can't be found, daddy. William Webb saw him an hour ago with a suit-case. He has not been seen since."

"I suspected as much! So it is he, is it? An hour ago, you say? He left, then, just in time to get the Limited for New York. We'll see what can be done. This is what we get, boy, for har-

boring a tramp and a vagrant. Jimmy Hampton is the thief!"

"No, no, daddy, it's not so. I know Jimmy is honest and has done you no harm. Jimmy's true blue, I know he is."

"We'll see!" answered Mr. Goselip as he called up the police over the telephone.

The tears were in Oswald's eyes. He thought of the last words the King of the Road had said to him, "I'll be satisfied if only you remain faithful to me."

"I see it all now," the noble little fellow said to himself, "Jimmy knows more about this than he can tell just yet, but whatever he is doing, it is for the best. I'll never doubt you, Jimmy, I believe in you—you're true blue!"

CHAPTER V

"THE CANOTS WHO CAN"

"WELL, now that we're all together, let's get down to business."

"Three cheers and a tiger for Brookline, fellows!"

"And a long one for our new baseball team!"

"This is as jolly as being at Calixtus, isn't it?"

"As jolly? Why, 'Handsome,' it's wonderful! Calixtus isn't in it with this!"

"What's keeping the Doll? He said he was coming right out."

"Here he comes, now. Hello, Os, old boy, where have you been keeping yourself?"

"I've been after these balls and gloves and things. We'll have to get busy, boys, and get this team into some sort of working order."

"Well," grumbled "Spider," "we've been ready for the past hour. We were waiting for you."

A shadow passed over Oswald Page's face as he thought of the busy hour it had been for him. He quickly brushed all such thoughts aside, however, for he did not wish to spoil the happiness of his friends.

"I've spent a busy morning helping Daddy Goselip. But I'm free now. So let's get started. First, what'll we call our team?"

"What do you say about the 'Canots'?" asked Tom Palmer with a twinkle in his eye.

"Bosh!" scorned "Handsome" Hurley. "What a name! Do you want to be called the 'can nots' just to prove that you can? That's worse than Pop Green's logic."

"But see what the word stands for," argued Tom.

"I fail to see just what it does stand for, unless it is 'defeat.'"

"Defeat nothing! it means the 'Calixtus Academy Nine of the South.' We have practically the whole Calixtus team now, and so I think the name a good one."

"It sounds good to me," stated Oswald, "but we'll have to work hard to prove that in baseball it means the 'Cans' instead of the 'Canots.'"

"All right, that's the name," yielded 'Handsome.'

"It's a beaut, I think," piped up "Spider" Webb.

The others agreed, and so a rousing cheer went up for the "Canots who can!"

"Now that's settled, how about a captain?"

"I propose Oswald Page for captain," it was Tom Palmer's voice.

"And I."

"And I."

"And I."

Every boy in the group except Oswald quickly voiced his approbation.

"That's very nice of you all, but you've over-

looked one point," reminded Oswald. "We are the 'Calixtus Academy Nine of the South,' and as such we have a captain. Tom Palmer is our captain and needs no electing."

A long and heated (though friendly) debate followed, but Oswald would not yield, so Thomas Palmer was named captain, whilst Oswald became manager.

It took but a few minutes to arrange the positions on the team, for each boy retained the place he had played previously. Oswald Page and "Handsome" Hurley were both to pitch, the one playing left field while the other was in the box.

"Now, before we go out to practise," announced the new manager, "I have a pleasant communication to make. Our first game will be called tomorrow afternoon at 2.30 and we will have no other than the famous Brookline Radiants as our opponents."

"And is Harold Oakley to play?" asked "Spider."

"Of course he'll play; he's their star catcher."

"Good night!" piously groaned "Spider," thinking of the morning's experience. "I long for a whack at the Brookline Radiants."

"Well, to the field now. We have little enough time to get into trim for the game. They're a sturdy team, those Radiants."

"Especially dear Harold," sighed Webb.

The following afternoon was clear and warm. The June sun shed its rays mercilessly on the young players, but they noticed it not.

"Great baseball weather, this!" cried "Handsome" Hurley, as he carefully weighed several bats supplied by the manager of the "Canots." "They're a husky-looking crowd, Os. I believe we'll both have to work together."

"How's the arm, Doll? Got your sweater with you? Good! Come along now and warm up."

"We better both warm up, I guess. You know, I've played only one real game before this," answered Oswald.

"But such a game!" sighed the irrepressible "Spider." "Don't do a bit better than you did against the Richmond Reds, and we'll not kick. Hey, you!" he thundered to two of the opposing players, who had taken up a position behind Oswald, "beat it while the track's hot. You'll see what he's got when you're up to bat."

"We should worry," rejoined the enemy. "That doll face is enough to help any batter knock a homer."

"You knock a homer and I'll lose the ball the next time up," boasted "Spider." "Come, Os, to work!"

The Radiants were indeed true to their name, at least in suits and hopefulness. Each wore a gaudy red uniform with a large golden circle in the centre of the jersey, from which radiated lines to represent fire. Seeming to realize their advantage in age and weight, the Radiants were almost boastful. Perhaps if they had heard of the game with the Richmond Reds, they would *not have been* quite so confident.

After the usual disputes, the game began and soon developed into a hotly fought but friendly contest. Oswald stepped into the pitcher's box much more bravely than on the day of his first game two months ago. His confidence, however, received a check, for the first batter knocked a high fly to Hurley, who was not playing deep enough. It meant two safe bases for the runner. The second player fouled out, but the third sent a hot drive over the third base line. The runner blocked the second baseman effectively and all were declared safe. That was the last. Oswald Page ran his hand slowly through his hair, then swiftly let the ball drive for the batter's head. Of course, the batter ducked, but the umpire called, "One strike."

Before the batter had time to recover, the ball was in Oswald's hands and off again. The batter was really nervous now, and struck at a wide out. He foul-tipped the next, but despite the encouraging words of his fellow-players, he failed miserably on the last. The next man dropped an easy one between first and second and was thrown out.

The Canots failed to score in their half. As the game progressed they began to look worried. At the end of seven innings there was no change on either side, the score being one to nothing in favor of the Radiants. Harold Oakley was flushed with victory. Throughout the game he had tried in every way to provoke trouble with William Webb, but that young man was bound to keep

his morning's resolution and have no more fighting. Harold had not been able to "find" the "doll-faced pitcher." In fact, he had struck out the three times he had been to bat. This angered him and he came to the plate in sheer desperation in the eighth. He would reach first by fair means or foul, so when Oswald pitched a ball which seemed somewhat less speedy than the others, Harold made a feint at dodging it, but in reality stepped directly in its path and was hit in the side. He fell to the ground and for a few minutes was unable to rise. The umpire, failing to see that he had purposely stepped in front of the ball, declared him free to take first. A runner was supplied him, all of which was greatly against the loud-voiced wishes of Webb, who had plainly seen the shrewd trick. However, "Spider's" objections were overruled by the umpire and the game proceeded.

Poor Oswald was nervous. He would rather have hit any one than Harold Oakley, if hit he must. Not because he liked Harold—for he did not. Oswald had openly challenged Harold's father in an accusing gaze this very morning, and now to hit the son with a speedily driven ball appeared malicious rather than accidental. Hence Oswald was nervous. The consequence was, before he had again mastered himself, he let one man walk and allowed the next a clean three-bagger. The score stood three to nothing. Oswald once more ran his hand through his hair, an action which always meant danger with him.

In a very few minutes he had struck out in succession three hopeful batters.

The Canots came to bat feeling somewhat downcast. It was "Spider" Webb who started things then. Weighing two bats in order to find the choicer of the two, he spoke to Harold, who was able to don the catcher's mask again. "Now, Percy, dear, if your side does not pain you too excruciatingly, kindly stand on your toes and watch the ball."

"You couldn't hit the broad side of a barn," scoffed the other.

"Play ball!" cried "Spider."

The very first ball went flying out to left field. With a wild yell, "Spider" fairly darted to first, then to second and then to third. He barely made safe at third, for the fielder was prompt in returning the ball. Tom Palmer followed with a sacrifice.

The Canots cheered loudly and hopefully when "Spider" safely crossed the home plate. "Camel" O'Hara walked and "Legs" Brennan singled.

A great hope rose up in the hearts of the Academy boys. There was still time to win. Oswald Page stepped to bat. He was tired, for he had remained firm in the pitcher's box during the game. He was worried about his father and about Jimmy. As he hit the plate a resounding blow with his bat, he heard Harold Oakley's voice behind him.

"Well, sweet face," murmured his tormentor,

"we are sorry to say it, but this game will never be called on account of darkness."

"Wait and watch," replied Oswald. "It may be called on account of a lost ball."

"Play ball!" called the umpire.

"Watch 'im close, Os, old boy, now or never."

"One ball."

"That's the boy, Os, your eye is good to-day. Don't let 'em fool you."

"One strike."

"That's only one, Doll. You've got two big ones!" Tom Palmer was indeed excited, for he knew it was now or never to get that game. He watched Oswald's graceful form at bat, he could see his keen eye following every movement of the pitcher. Suddenly a sharp crack! A bat fell at Tom's feet; a lithe little form darted toward first; "Camel" O'Hara touched the home plate; "Legs" Brennan was at his heels, and Oswald Page, whose long hit into right field was the best of the day, almost overtook "Legs" on the homeward stretch. He beat the accurate throw of the ball by about ten seconds and scored a home run. The score was four to three now in favor of the Canots, and all the credit coming to Oswald Page! Long, lusty cheers went up from excited throats, but Oswald calmly exhorted his players to stick together for the final inning. He might have saved his breath, however, for the Radiants were struck out in one, two, three order by Oswald's tantalizing curves. The last man to bat and the last man to strike out was Harold Oakley.

With great rejoicing the new team prepared to leave the field. Harold Oakley stepped over to Oswald Page and with a dark scowl on his face, said: "No wonder you'd win with the umpire on your side. Who couldn't win when three runs are counted on a foul ball."

Webb, who was with Oswald, was about to make an angry reply, for Oswald's hit was fair by at least two feet. Oswald, however, placed his arm on Webb's shoulder and drew him back. Then, in an undertone he spoke to Oakley. "Will you bring a message to your father from me?" he asked.

Oakley merely stared.

"Tell him," continued Oswald, "that I beat his son honestly and squarely in a game of baseball, and I intend to beat him honestly and squarely in a bigger game."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Harold Oakley, in anger.

But Oswald had hurried along to overtake his friends.

CHAPTER VI

JIMMY HAMPTON AND AN IDEA COME TO GOLD POT

MR. WILLIAM SAUNDERS sat before the open door of the "Lost Claim Hotel." The strong rays of the July sun beat upon his powerful frame, but he seemed to be too lazy to move into the shade. He yawned noisily and stretched himself with both arms in the air. Then tilting his chair against the rough hewn logs of the building he closed his eyes.

"Things is pretty quiet in this town lately," he complained to himself. "I thought when that crowd landed two weeks ago, I'd be kept busy. But didn't they go right off to Gold Pot and I haven't seen sign or light of them since. I'd sell out this whole blamed establishment for six dollars and ninety-eight cents cash."

"Well, pard, if I had the six ninety-eight, I'd take your offer, but as it is, I've got enough for a treat, I guess. Come on and clink the glasses!"

The proprietor of the "Lost Claim" came to his feet with a start, dropped his pipe from his open mouth and stared at the new comer in astonishment.

"I say, friend, 'taint safe in Arizony to take a man so sudden-like. Where'd you come from and where ye goin'?"

"All in good time, beau, but just now the sand's

in my throat. I'm here for a wash-out, so produce the goods."

Bill Saunders still gazed at the stranger before him and as he gazed, another man, long, lanky bewhiskered, stumbled up beside the first. For a moment Bill felt like seeking his "shooting irons," but something in the bearing of the first stranger seemed to reassure him. The man was of slender build, although the shoulders were broad and straight. A week's stubby growth of beard made his face hideous, but the clear blue eyes that twinkled there were the eyes of an honest man. Finally Bill Saunders turned his gaze from the strangers, entered the bar and asked:

"Well, what's it to be?"

The thirsty customer hesitated, looked yearningly at the tempting array of bottles, sighed pathetically and asked, not without an effort, "Got any sas'prilla?"

"Any what!" gasped Saunders.

"Hard o' hearin'?" snapped the stranger.

"One little one won't hurt us," pleaded the lanky one.

"By the great horn spoon! Sas'prilla in the Lost Claim!" Suddenly Bill Saunders placed both hands on his hips and laughed heartily. "I haven't had a call like that, pard, since the Terror left here more'n three years ago."

"The Terror? Who was he? Must have been some terror to raise his courage on phonies. Howsomever, I'll take nothing stronger. Give me a *soda or* some such thing to wash down this in-

fernal Arizona sand—and you, Bones, take your choice of milk or coffee."

The man addresed as "Bones" sighed, but for the moment made no other complaint.

Still chuckling, Bill managed to find a bottle of soda.

"Goin' to stay around these diggin's long?" he inquired.

"No offence, partner, but I'm my own counselor. However, if you've got a couple of two-by-eights we might condescend to hang up our hats for the night."

"Best accommodations in all Arizony, sir. Sign here." Bill Saunders proudly pushed the old register toward his guest. Before signing, the stranger looked through the meager list of names. Six appeared within as many years, but the one that seemed to hold his attention was "Alexander Goselip, Boston."

"Don't seem to have many guests, do you?"

Bill was eagerly watching for the signature of his new arrivals. "No," he answered, trying to curb his impatience. "We don't advertise much as a summer hotel." He strained his eyes then for the stranger was writing. Here is what he placed in the book—"Jimmy Hampton—Knight—Address—The Universe."

"Bones McCabe—Address—likewise."

Saunders straightened up quickly and felt in his pocket to see if his gun was ready.

"Ye won't need it, friend," spoke Jimmy, surmising his action. "I'm not the 'Terror.' " Then

he threw down a greenback on the counter. "May as well do a cash business, ye know; perhaps I won't have any left by to-morrow. And by the way," he spoke as though it were an after thought. "This here 'Bones,' my companion, you know; treat him well, but I'll hold you accountable if a drop of liquor goes down his throat."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied Bill, his eyes and attention rivetted on the greenbacks. They were scarce in Gold Pot district.

Jimmy Hampton, Knight of the Road, surveyed his new quarters.

"So this," he spoke aloud, as he glanced through the windows at the steep cliffs of Gold Pot, "was Oswald's home. Poor kid!"

"What's that, partner? 'Oswald' you say? There's been only one 'Oswald' in this part of the country, and he left more'n three years ago. If you're a friend o' his'n, I'm yours to command."

"Yes, Bill Saunders, for I think the Doll said that was your name, I'm Oswald Page's friend, and I'm here to get him out of trouble."

"What, man, the 'Terror' in trouble! I wouldn't let any one harm that little golden-head for all the silver and gold on yonder mountain."

"Nobly said, old man, shake on that. Now we're friends. Sit down till I tell you about the kid."

It was not long before Jimmy Hampton and Bill Saunders were staunch friends. Bill was more than delighted to hear from the "Terror"

of Gold Pot. However, when he heard of the little fellow's trouble, tears stole silently and unheeded down his rough cheeks; and then at the account of the actions of Oswald's enemy, Bill rose in anger and paced the room, nervously fingering his revolver. However, he spoke no word till Jimmy Hampton finished.

"I've got the silver mine papers tucked away safely in my pocket now," concluded Jimmy, "and I don't mean to part with them until I give them to the owner if they're valuable or throw them away if they're not."

"Poor little lad," spoke the proprietor of the Lost Claim, more to himself than to his guests, "Will I ever forget his face and voice! And that day when I peeped through the key-hole and heard him sing to the stranger, and the little bird came and perched on the window sill! Ah, those were the great days. It's been lonesome here since the 'Terror' left. Poor kid, I'd willingly lay down this worthless carcass for him. Partner, I must do something for him!"

"Under the circumstances, friend William, the best thing you can do at the present moment is to prepare a good feed of ham and eggs for five men—I'm three o' that five and 'Bones' McCabe, here, is the other two."

Thus called to the limelight, "Bones" seemed to pick up courage. "Say, Jimmy," he complained, "if I thought Arizona was anything like *this,* you'd never get 'Bones' McCabe to fall for *it. What's* your next move? Since you've grown

nurse girl to golden-headed kidlets, I think your brain is softening."

"Drink up, 'Bones,' then cheer up. There's the smell o' good ham and eggs now, and here's a glass o' the finest sody in Arizony."

"Soda nothin'! I'll take—"

"You'll take your little nip o' soda the same as the Honorable James Hampton here, and that's the strongest you'll take until this little joke is finished. Come, cheer up."

"Yes, cheer up on Arizony sand and baby-milk! What do you think I am made of, ginger-bread?"

"No compliments on yourself now, 'Bones.' Just drink up and calm down; and while you're standing you may as well sit."

"Gents, your eats!" ceremoniously announced the proprietor of the "Lost Claim."

"Bring on the banquet," cheerfully sang the Knight of the Road. "Fain would we regale ourselves on your sumptuous delicacies."

Bill Saunders almost dropped the plate of hot ham and eggs.

"Did you, er—say something?" he asked.

"Very little, my friend, very little. And I intend to say less now that I have a chance to sharpen my molars on your French-fry. Cavort thy chair hither, friend Bones, and sample the tempting viands."

"Bones" McCabe chuckled as he helped himself liberally. "Not a bad idea at that," he replied between bites.

Bill Saunders watched the hungry men. His slow brain was trying to solve the subtle problem raised by Hampton's story of Oswald Page. Finally an idea seemed to find space. "You say they're silver mines?" he asked suddenly.

"Eh, what? Silver mines?" Jimmy seemed dazed. "My friend, I'm saying nothing but sawing ham. When I have this feed safely tucked away under my belt, I'll talk silver or gold, just as you please."

Saunders seemed not to hear. Slowly the idea was gaining headway. He spoke his thoughts aloud. "Yes, that's just it. The silver mines. That's why they're on Gold Pot now."

Jimmy Hampton arose from his chair with a bound. With mouth filled, he tried to talk, failed, coughed, choked, and sat down. "Bones" McCabe solemnly arose and planted his right hand with the full strength of his long arm, on Jimmy's back. It was a blow to fell an ox. Jimmy spluttered, and then the coughing ceased. Rising once more, he grasped the astonished Saunders by the wrist and fairly roared: "What's that you've been saying? Who's on Gold Pot and why?"

"Finished your eggs?" calmly asked Bill. "Bones" laughed.

"I'll finish more than eggs," cried Jimmy, tightening his grip on the proprietor's wrist, "if you don't answer my question."

Calmly, but with a quick movement of his arm, Bill Saunders swung the unsuspecting Jimmy to

one side, picked him up bodily and sat him, with no great gentleness, in his chair by the table. "Finish your eats," he said laconically.

Jimmy was surprised. He had always been "king" and wielded the upper hand. Now, to be handled like a child was too much. However, he had met his match in this huge bulk of a good-natured westerner.

"Take your medicine and eat," spoke up "Bones." "The trick was neatly done and I give my hand in praise to the first man who ever beat the 'King o' the Knights.' My hand, pard, and yours."

"Bones" shook the hand of Bill Saunders, and the rafters groaned with their laughter.

Jimmy scratched his head, and then with a broad grin, helped himself to three more eggs. "You win, pard," he said, "but I'll hold you to an explanation soon. I've come to this lost land for a purpose, and I think you've got the idea right within your stone-crusher."

Bill Saunders cleared his throat and spoke: "Partner, if you're a friend of Oswald Page, I've got an idea for your head. If you're his enemy, you'll not live long enough to make the idea worth much. Yonder," he pointed through the open door to the hills, "is Gold Pot Mountain. Take a good look at it, then smoke your pipe. You'll have a chance to climb up those steep cliffs in the dark to-night."

"Bill Saunders, I begin to think I've met the

right man. And if you have any doubt of my fidelity to Oswald Page, just bear in mind that I'd not only climb that peak in the dark to help him, I'd climb into a lion's mouth. Let's get going."

CHAPTER VII

ON THE RIVER CHARLES

Come along, boys,
Come along, boys!
Tear 'em out and eat 'em up,
A rattle snake and a yellow pup!
Get upon the big bus,
Make a noise, a big fuss.
We're all the way from Calixtus!
A blue thrush, a big rush,
Yell it loud,
CALIXTUS!!!

THE quiet old Boulevard rang with the shouts of the Calixtus boys. There were Tom Palmer, "Spider" Webb, "Handsome" Hurley, "Camel" O'Hara, "Legs" Brennan, and of course, Oswald Page, whose treble voice led the shout. All were in gay spirits this mild summer morning, for they were on their way to the Charles River to try out Oswald's new canoe.

The sun beat mildly on the bare heads of the happy boys, a quiet west wind cooled their cheeks. They were out for a frolic and were indeed ready for fun. Of course, they carried a tempting lunch, prepared under the personal supervision of Mrs. Goselip, which fact was guarantee enough for the most fastidious boy—if there ever was such a kind of boy on a picnic.

So they walked cheerfully along, yelling their college yells, singing their college songs, joking

and chattering just like the happy, care-free boys they were.

It is a wonderful period in life—this time of thoughtless, care-free, happy boyhood. Boys, remain young as long as you can. Of course, I don't mean by that that you should seek pleasure all the time. No, indeed, for there are hard-working, serious moments in the life of every good boy. I do mean, however, that you should keep your soul young—keep away from evil, from bad companions, from sin. For as soon as you lose your innocence—that greatest gift of God—you will lose your youth. Because Oswald and his friends had clean and innocent hearts, they were happy. As long, and only as long as you, dear reader, will keep from doing wrong, you too will be happy and young. You may grow in years beyond the fifties and yet remain a boy in innocence and virtue.

"It will seem good to get hold of a paddle again," cheerfully cried Tom, above the merry hubbub. "I haven't sat in a canoe since I left Calixtus."

"Perhaps you've forgotten how to paddle," playfully taunted "Spider" Webb.

"The Maze was fine for canoeing, wasn't it?" enthusiastically remarked "Handsome" Hurley.

"Yes, indeed; but wait till you try the Charles!" promised Oswald.

"It's a good thing we know how to swim, for I guess we're somewhat out of practise at the *paddles,*" volunteered "Camel" O'Hara.

"We'll take a chance," chorused two or three of the boys.

"Hark! What music mars the quiet air?" This from poetic "Legs" Brennan.

"'Mars' is good. That is the organ at Norumbega. Perhaps we will stop there for a while on our way home and have a ride on the merry-go-round. But here is the Charles, and there, fellows, is my new canoe. Isn't it a dandy?"

"Oh, but that's a picture! Isn't it a long one!"

"Yes—twenty-five feet long. There isn't a longer or a finer on the river. I have a small one, but Daddy Goselip said I would need one like this when my friends came to visit me."

"You're a lucky boy, Oswald."

Somehow this remark was not received as Tom Palmer meant it, for Oswald Page became serious and thoughtful for a moment. However, brushing aside whatever thought had caused him pain, he busied himself with the delicately outlined boat.

Soon the boys were seated in the frail craft and speeding along the quiet waters. Tom Palmer and William Webb handled the paddles, the other boys reclined at their ease in the bottom of the canoe. It is surprising how smoothly and swiftly a well managed canoe will slip through the waters. True, it takes a certain amount of skill, otherwise the occupants would soon find themselves floundering about in the water, with an overturned boat somewhere in their vicinity. Our boys, however, from constant practise on Lake Maze, at

Calixtus, were quite proficient in the art, and as they had exchanged their clothing for bathing suits, they little feared a ducking. Perhaps, before the day's pleasure was over, they might voluntarily upset the frail boat, but certainly not until the appetizing lunch they carried with them had been exhausted.

For some time they plied steadily along, taking turns with the paddles. Suddenly, however, Oswald's attention was drawn to another boat somewhat ahead of them.

"I do believe that is Harold Oakley and Benny Campion," he cried. "I'm surprised that Harold should be so far from shore in a canoe, for he cannot swim."

"Let us catch up to them," said Tom, scenting a race.

"All right, then, go to it. Steady and even now. Not too strong, 'Spider,' we'll turn turtle with a stroke like that."

William soon calmed himself and the boys fell back once more into that steady, even stroke which always produces more speed than a stronger and more uneven one.

Very soon the distance between the two boats grew less and Oswald could plainly see Harold Oakley. While he watched, a strange thing happened. The voices of the two suddenly rose in anger, both boys ceased rowing at the same moment. The canoe lurched unevenly as Harold, raising his paddle, struck wildly at his companion. There seemed to be some serious difference of

opinion, and both boys forgot they were in a frail boat which demands a certain dignity of motion.

Benny Campion raised himself to a standing position and was about to hurl himself roughly on Oakley when, of course, the boat turned over, and both sank into the waters of the Charles.

As the river is wide and very deep at this point, Oswald realized the danger, especially for Oakley, who was not a swimmer.

"Quick, boys," he cried, "paddle hard. Harold will drown, for he can't swim!"

Under the strong, steady stroke of Tom and William, the canoe sped along. Oswald, alert and ready for action, strained his eyes for a glimpse of the two boys. Soon he saw Campion grasp the overturned canoe. He was safe, at least for the present. But where was Oakley? Ah, yes, there he was, a wild, haggard expression on his face, his hands clutching the water—only a moment and he was gone again.

Quick as a flash, Oswald arose, steadied himself to get his bearings, and dove from the boat into the water. How long he seemed to be gone! His companions, in their excitement, thought he would never come to the surface. In reality, however, it was only a few seconds when he rose, clutching Oakley about the shoulders. Harold was dazed and half unconscious. He clutched blindly at Oswald and would have strangled him had not the plucky boy doubled his fist and struck the half-drowned lad a stinging blow behind the ear. The blow was true and rendered Oakley unconscious.

The work of rescue then was merely a matter of a few moments, for with the aid of the other boys, Harold was placed in the canoe, the other boat was righted and Campion, with very little aid, climbed aboard. In silence the party turned homeward, O'Hara administering such "first aid" to the unconscious boy as he could think of.

They reached the boat-house and were beginning to look worried before Harold opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he muttered, "What has happened?"

"Thank God, you are in the bottom of our canoe and not at the bottom of the Charles," briskly answered O'Hara, who felt greatly relieved at his success.

"Now I remember," shuddered Harold. "But how did I get here? Who took me out of the water?"

"You may thank Oswald Page that you are alive, Oakley. And I'd advise you, the next time you go into a canoe, be more prepared to swim than to fight."

"You're right. I was a fool. Is Benny there?"

Assured of this, he turned to thank Oswald, in a shamefaced fashion.

"I've been pretty mean to some of you boys, and I'm sorry. Oswald, I can't thank you as I would like to, but I certainly do feel a debt of gratitude, and I—"

"Now, Harold, let us not talk about it. I knew you couldn't swim, so I simply dove in and pulled

you out. I learned to swim at Calixtus, so it wasn't so brave."

"Yes, it was brave, Oswald. Do not try to lessen it one bit. I know now that I was a fool. And we were arguing over such a simple thing, too. I'll be more careful the next time. But now, something else is on my mind. Do you remember what you said to me after the ball game?"

"Please don't mention that, Harold."

"But I must mention it now, Oswald. I did not know what you meant then, but I suspected something was wrong. So I watched my father to see what it was. I suppose it is not a very faithful way to act toward him, but you see, I must confess. He is doing wrong. I didn't mind that until now, but now I'm going to try to be honest. Here is a letter, Page, it is wet, but I guess you can make it out. My father asked me to mail it. Read it when you get a chance. Perhaps it will help you keep the threat you made when we finished that ball game."

Oswald was quite astonished at the way the event had turned out. He took the letter and placed it in his pocket for a more favorable opportunity to read it.

* * *

It was a sober party that made the trip to Brookline. Oswald was thinking about the letter and the others had enough to think of without talking very much. The trolley on which they rode traveled all too slowly, for they were anxious to return.

As they reached the yard of their Brookline home, Dr. Martin was coming from the house, a solemn look upon his generally happy face. Oswald rushed toward him, a sudden fear rising in his heart.

"My mother, doctor? What—"

"Your mother is well, my boy. Don't get so excited, or I'll have to give you some pills, too. Your father is somewhat overworked and seems to have received news that causes him concern—but I trust there is no danger."

Oswald waited for no more, but rushed into the house, and to the room of his father. There lay Mr. Goselip, tired, weak, overworked, sick and discouraged. In his hand he still held a letter.

"Oswald, my son," he tried to speak cheerfully. "I fear I'll make you a pauper yet. I've no business head left. I'm only—"

He stopped as though further effort would be too great.

"Hush, Daddy Goselip," whispered Oswald. "I know of your trouble. I know more than you think I do, and I do not think it is so serious. Anyway, the doctor said you must not worry or think of business matters for a while. Will you leave them to me now? Will you trust me and let me bring you out of this? I acted like a man once before, didn't I? I can do it again. Only say you will let me try!"

"*Little* Doll, I am the child now, you are the *man. Perhaps* you are right. I can do nothing.

Go, in God's name, and may He help you for your own sake, not mine."

"Thank you, Daddy Goselip! And let me tell you this—you need worry no longer. Just try to get well and I promise you that everything will come out all right."

The sick man closed his eyes. "You are still the man of the house, after all," he murmured.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT

IT was night. Blackness enshrouded the land in its heavy veil. Not a star in the sky, not a light to relieve the terrible blackness of the land! Even the towering form of Gold Pot was hidden. Nevertheless, Bill Saunders did not hesitate as he led the way up the faint, rugged path to the summit of the mountain.

"Now, my lads," he cautioned, "follow me close; do not stir a twig, and don't chatter. We must not be seen nor heard this night."

"Remember, 'Bones,' no talking. If you succeed in keeping the crack in your ivory dome closed, you'll be worth a leather medal."

In spite of his humorous words, there was a firm and tense expression on Jimmy Hampton's sunburned face. It was an important moment for him, a moment, that, he hoped, would decide great things for Oswald. If they could examine the conditions of the Gold Pot Mines, learn just what was going on there he felt that they would have won a great victory over deceit and fraud. They would do their work unobserved and slip away under cover of darkness.

"These Arizona nights are the blackest things I've ever saw," ungrammatically complained "*Bones.*"

The three proceeded in silence. They went slowly, for the path was steep and narrow. Without the aid of their guide, the two men could never have reached the summit of that mountain in the dark, but Bill seemed familiar with every foot of the way. Now and then he would caution them against an overhanging limb, or would turn to help them over an exceptionally rough spot. The varied noises of the forest darkness were strange to the two. More than once a cold shiver ran up the spine of "Bones" McCabe, and he complained again and again of the whole enterprise. Each time he was quietly yet roughly checked by Jimmy.

Hours seemed to pass and still they slowly mounted. Their feet were sore, their backs were aching, they were suffering with the heat, for the night was a sultry one. However, they kept on steadily.

Finally Bill stopped short and urged silence. A light could be seen in the distance.

"It is the log-cabin in which Oswald was born," he whispered, "and now it is in the hands of strangers and robbers."

Jimmy peered into the darkness, relieved only by the dim rays of the little candle shining from the window.

"Let's be on our way!" he whispered.

"Softly, slowly!" warned the practical Bill Saunders. "I don't suppose they have any guards out, and yet we can't be too careful. A man's life ain't safe in the hands of the fellows

around that candle; and a dead man in these hills ain't tellin' no tales!"

"Bones" McCabe shuddered at this ghastly thought. He would have advised an immediate return to the Lost Claim, but he dared not brave the wrath of Jimmy.

Once again they began to move. Slowly they edged onward. Soon they halted once more, to plan their next step. Bill wished to go ahead and spy upon the cabin, but Jimmy insisted that he should do that himself.

"I can't lose my way now, for the light will guide me," he said, "and I'll return here as soon as I've satisfied myself and found what I'm looking for."

"Well if you insist," granted Bill, "I suppose it's all right. If you get into any mixup, shout for us. We'll be here, guns and all. And if you lose your way, follow the sound of the screech-owl. I guess I haven't forgotten how."

Bill uttered a weird cry, in imitation of the owl, and "Bones" jumped. Bill laughed softly.

"Follow that," he whispered, "and you'll come to us. No one notices the sound of the owl, for it is a nightly scolder in the woods around here."

Another minute, and Jimmy, his ugly revolver in his hand, moved cautiously towards the cabin. His heart beat quickly, for it was a new venture for him. No thought of fear entered his mind, for Jimmy Hampton had not yet added that little word to his vocabulary. He feared, if you wish to use the word, that he would not succeed in his

venture, but he did not fear at all for his own safety. Soon, by crawling along on his stomach, he reached the cabin and peered in through the open window. Six men sat around a large table. They were bending over a map.

"They're a tough-looking set," thought Jimmy "I wouldn't like to have them see me here."

They did not see him, for they were interested in their work. One, who seemed to be the leader, spoke, pointing to the map.

"If we tunnel here, I am sure we will hit that vein from the north end," he said, "and then we can work both ends at once. That spot yields the finest ore I've seen in my day, and there's plenty of it, too. I hope Oakley sends the machinery out soon."

"How about the land?" asked another. "Has he got it yet? You know Goselip is a pretty shrewd chap, and they say he's seen this part of the country."

"He's seen it well enough. It was out here he got that little human bird that made such a hit with his voice a few years ago."

"Yes, I've heard him. The 'Golden Lark,' they called him, and he was some wonder!"

"That may be," interrupted another. "It'll never get us anywhere. Has Oakley got the land —that's the question? I heard he sent a 'second-story' man after the stock and the boob failed. Was taken in pretty cleverly by this same Lark. Then Oakley started for the stock himself, said

that Rhoakes got chicken-hearted, had qualms of conscience, and wanted to buy it at the same price I sold, because it was no good."

"Well, didn't that fetch him? The market pronounced the stock valueless. We saw to that."

"Oh, Goselip fell for it, all right. But when he looked for the stock, it was gone—and when he looked for his chauffeur he was gone, too."

Jimmy Hampton so far forgot himself and his danger as to chuckle at this. Two of the men instantly jumped from their seats.

"What's that? I thought I heard a noise."

"Perhaps you did," easily answered the leader, "I'm hearing all sorts of noises around here. The woods is full of 'em."

"Yes, but this one was different," added the second man who had risen. "I'll be glad when we can get through. The whole thing is getting on my nerves."

"Don't worry. It will soon be over. Oakley's got a dozen men on the track of the missing chauffeur, and he'll get him soon, papers and all. Then there need be no more secrets. We can out with it all, and the Gold Pot Mining Syndicate will be known all over the country as the richest syndicate in the world."

Jimmy had heard enough. He knew, now, that the stock was of great value. He would return as soon as possible, face Oakley and redeem the fortunes of Mr. Goselip and Oswald. In the midst of his thoughts he heard the scream of the hoot owl.

"Now, that's strange," he said. "I thought

Bill was over this way, and yet his signal comes from the opposite direction. I declare, this country has me all mixed up." He looked around irresolutely and then the same signal sounded again, but this time it came from an entirely different direction.

"Thundering gray coats!" ejaculated Jimmy aloud, forgetting in his new predicament, the danger from the cabin. "I'm buffaloed! First it comes from this way and then from that way and now—"

"Well, my man, now you'd better come our way," ejaculated a rough voice. Before Jimmy had time to move or realize his danger, he was surrounded by the six men, who had overheard him. He was seized and dragged into the cabin and the door securely barred after him.

"I thought I heard some noise not of the forest natural!" cried one of the men who had heard Jimmy's first chuckle, "I wonder if this is the missing chauffeur."

Jimmy Hampton could have wept in anguish. If his arms were free, he would have fought the six of them, but it was useless, he knew, to try force. For the present he was powerless. Perhaps Bill would miss him soon and would succeed in rescuing him.

"You've got me strangled for the present, friend Rhoakes," he said cheerfully, smiling upon the leader. "But, then, a good king is bound to rule. Where am I to sleep?"

* * *

Bill Saunders and "Bones" McCabe waited patiently for the return of Jimmy. An hour passed. The little light had disappeared from the cabin. Bill began to grow impatient and to blame himself for allowing Jimmy to proceed alone. He raised his hands to his mouth and uttered the cry of the screech owl. A moment there was deep silence, then came an answering cry from the depths of the forest. An owl was answering its mate.

Another hour dragged. Occasionally Bill would give his signal, but the silence of the forest, or perhaps a return hoot was the only answer. The forest was black and silent. Only the screech of the owl, or the steady chirp of the cricket sounded through the quiet air.

The two men, in silence, finally crept toward the cabin. They came to the door. It was closed. Cautiously, with weapons ready, Bill pushed it open. All was silent. They peered into the blackness, then still more cautiously entered. The truth dawned upon them. The cabin was empty.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN OF JIMMY HAMPTON

THE month of July was slowly creeping by. The boys had enjoyed a most wonderful celebration of the "Fourth," and yet, as they all noticed, Oswald Page was not happy. Something seemed to weigh upon his mind and, although he always tried to laugh it off when the boys mentioned it, dark circles were gathering under his eyes. Tom Palmer, in particular, had noticed it, and his heart was touched, for he remembered the days at Calixtus when Oswald was in pain and kept all his sorrows to himself.

One evening about the middle of July, Oswald sat alone before the open grate of the fireplace. The dying embers still sent forth some heat, and the heat was welcome, for a damp east wind was blowing, making the evening a chilly one. For the hundredth time, Oswald re-read the letter he held in his hand.

"July 16th is the date," he read. "Pull the stunt clean. He has lost about all hope of any returns from the Eastern Troupe, but this stunt will kill him. I'll have all the details arranged. The Eastern Troupe must not only disband, it must leave ruin and debt in its wake. All Boston will be at the Academy on the 16th. Open the doors as usual, get your crowd seated, gather together every cent of the receipts and at 8.15 skip.

Be sure Raoul and Bartrand are with you. The curtain will not rise, the people will demand the return of their money, the management its guarantee, and Goselip will go into the bankrupt court, if not to jail. Do it all quietly but effectively. I'll meet you at the North Station and together we'll dig to the woods until the thing dies down, and then we'll enjoy our golden harvest. I'll have the mine stock before then, for I'm on the right track now. Don't fail me.—Oakley."

The letter was addressed to Manager Dowd of the Eastern Troupe.

"To-morrow is the sixteenth," soliloquized Oswald, "and Daddy Goselip is not well enough to be told of this terrible plot. I wish Jimmy were here to help me. I know he never meant harm to me and yet it is so strange that he does not return. Well, I'll have to carry out my plan without him. It's fortunate Harold gave me this letter two weeks ago, for I think the fellows will do their part now. They worked pretty hard and never asked a question. Anyhow, the curtain goes up to-morrow night even without Dowd and his dishonest friends. I'll never be able to sleep! I'm too excited."

"Is that you, Oswald? Why aren't you in bed? Do you know it's after ten?"

"Hello, Tom, what's the matter? Better go to bed and sleep, for we need your help to-morrow. Don't mind me. I can't sleep yet."

Instead of going to bed, Tom Palmer came over to the chair of his friend.

"You're worrying too much, Os, my boy. Your father will get well. Dr. Martin said so. Why do you still worry like this? I've noticed it for weeks."

"I've a good mind to tell you to-night, Tom, for I'll need your help to-morrow and the help of all the fellows. Yes, I'll tell you about it now. I know it's late but—yet, get your hat and we'll take a walk, and I'll give you my plans. To-morrow night we have our play at the Academy."

"What! At the Academy! Surely, Os, you're joking. Why, every seat in the Academy is sold out for to-morrow night and the people are all excited because of the arrival in Boston of the famous Raoul-Bartrand Troupe. What can we do?"

"Come along and I'll tell you. I'm too excited to sleep."

A few moments later the boys left the house. The streets were almost deserted and as Oswald led the way into a quiet section, they were able to talk unmolested and unheard. First he told the astonished Tom of the letter Harold had given him the day of the accident on the river; then he explained the meaning of all the mysterious rehearsals in the garage during the past few weeks. "You know, Tom," he added, "the people have not forgotten the 'Golden Lark,' although no one knows that I and the Lark are the same. They'll be glad to welcome him back to the stage, and I think, with the help of my friends, I can make the audience at the Academy forget their disap-

pointment in not seeing Raoul and Bartrand. I wish Jimmy was with me, though, for there is the matter of Dowd and the door money to handle. I often wonder if I did right in sending Dowd the original of this letter, allowing him to think his plan was undiscovered. It's too late now, anyhow, so we'll have to fight it out the best way we can."

The two boys had forgotten the lateness of the hour. They had long since passed into a quiet country road. It was quite deserted, and but very few houses lined the street. Still, they walked on, talking and planning earnestly.

* * *

Jimmy Hampton groaned in anguish as he tried once more to break down the stout oaken door.

"So near and so helpless!" he cried to himself. "I am surely within an hour's brisk walk of Oswald and yet I am powerless. Surely the poor child must have lost all faith in Jimmy Hampton. What a fool I've been! I must be getting old, or I'd have slipped away before this. Well, anyhow, I'm near home, for they brought me east, thinking that I've hidden the stock somewhere around Boston. I'll die a thousand deaths before they get that silver mine stock. Silence now, you old tramp, your noise has aroused some one."

True enough, steps were approaching the door. A key was fitted into the lock, the door was flung open and the dim light of a lantern revealed the

evil faces of two men. They were the broker, Mr. Oakley, and his companion in evil, Rhoakes.

"What's all this noise about in here?" cried Rhoakes. "Do you think you can tear down this stout oak? Guess again, my man! In fact, it would do you little good if you succeeded, for there are four men guarding you."

"Let me do the talking," smoothly interrupted Oakley. Turning to Jimmy he continued speaking: "Now, Hampton, I think you'll agree that the safest course for you to pursue is to gain our friendship. You know the police are still looking for you, and we might be able to give them a clue."

"The police are entirely welcome, gentlemen," cheerfully answered Jimmy. "I doubt very much if you and the police are on speaking terms."

"Where have you hidden those papers?" demanded Oakley.

"You can search me," laconically answered Jimmy.

"We'll do more than that," threatened Rhoakes. "You and you alone know where those papers are, and we will have them before to-morrow night. What can you do with them? They are valueless to you."

Oakley interrupted.

"Come, friend Hampton, we'll make it well worth your while if you turn them over to us. We'll keep silent and fatten your pocket-book to your heart's content."

Jimmy Hampton turned white with rage. How

dared they even insinuate that he would betray the trust of Oswald Page! How dared they tempt him to sell his honor for gold! Jimmy Hampton may have been a rough character in his earlier days, he may have shunned toil and begged his living from good-natured housewives, he may have feared the police, who would have arrested him as a vagrant—but under all this he was "true blue!" No, Jimmy Hampton was too much of a man. However, he quickly hid his feelings, smiled at his captors and spoke slowly, as though with an effort.

"Give me till to-morrow afternoon," he said, "and then, if your gold glitters enough to tempt Jimmy Hampton's avarice, I may be able to serve you. Mind, though, your part of the bargain includes silence."

"Spoken like a man!" quickly replied Oakley, who had failed to note the deeper meaning of the captive. "I tell you, Hampton, you'll have gold enough to paint this town red. Why should you have anything to do with Goselip or his angel-faced kid? After to-morrow night the boy will be a pauper and the man may be in jail. Think of yourself now and what you can do with a roll of greenbacks. Here, Rhoakes, leave the lantern with Hampton. The room will be more pleasant with a light. Consider yourself our guest from this moment, friend Jimmy—our guest and not our captive. Au revoir until to-morrow. Sleep well! Don't weaken!"

A moment later the men were gone. Left alone,

Jimmy's thoughts were interesting. First he stormed up and down the little room, his face distorted with anger and rage—he raised his clinched fist and shook it at the door. More than once his honor had been attacked, and honor was all the riches Jimmy ever had or wished for. A clean soul, an honest mind, a tender heart; such qualities it was that formed the character of this man. And now, this villain had flaunted gold in his face. Once more he shook his fist, ground his teeth and paced the little room rapidly.

Gradually he became more quiet. A smile took the place of the ugly scowl. Then he laughed loud and heartily. The four men in the room beyond nodded one to another. Their prisoner was already enjoying in his dreams the gold he was to receive on the morrow. Jimmy's laugh, however, had a much different interpretation.

"I have gained more time, at any rate," he thought. "Ah, you little fox, there's still a bit of the life left in your ugly carcass. You've done one shrewd act and only one, the past two weeks. You have fooled the treacherous Oakley. And yet——" The smile faded away. "I've gained more time, but what good is that if I do not discover a means of escape? What did he mean by saying that Oswald would be a pauper by to-morrow night? I must get away from here if I have to tear the house down!"

For nearly an hour he sat and pondered. No plan came to him. The window in the room was too small to be of service. He had tried that, but

his ample proportions could not shrink enough to get through that small space. There must be some other way, perhaps he might—

He stopped short, for at this moment the soft, sweet strains of a song were wafted faintly to his ears. He quickly drew near the window and listened. The sound grew nearer and sweeter.

"That voice," he muttered to himself. "There is only one in the world like that. It must be! But, no, it can't be! And yet, and yet, it is!"

The song ceased right under his window. He could almost put out his hand and touch the head of the singer. Then a voice, and surely it was the voice of Oswald Page, could be heard distinctly:

"After I sing that, Tom, all the fellows enter and we begin, 'The Brown Thrush Chorus.' I'll carry the soprano note, and you fellows sing the parts just as we did in the garage yesterday. You know how it goes, like this——" softly Oswald hummed the sweet soprano air of "The Brown Thrush Chorus."

"Oswald, Oswald, don't make a sound, but draw near to the window."

"What is that, Tom? Did some one speak? I'm sure I heard a voice——"

"Yes, yes, Oswald. It's Jimmy! I'm in the room right over your head. Locked in. Don't make a sound, but try to get in here through the window. Ask Tom to give you a lift. I've got a lot to tell you. Be quiet. Work carefully, for I

am well guarded. You trust me in spite of all, don't you, Oswald?"

"I never doubted you, Jimmy. I knew you were true blue!"

"God bless you for that!" almost sobbed Jimmy. "You're one in a million, Oswald Page, yes, one in a dozen million!"

* * *

Two hours later, Jimmy Hampton slept in his prison room, slept peacefully, with a smile on his face. His dreams, too, were pleasant, for more than once he muttered to himself, "God is good, Jimmy. He has not forgotten your little Lark." And more than once, partially waking from his sleep, Jimmy Hampton would quickly put his hand to his pocket. Then his eyes would pop right open, and he would hold before the dim rays of the lantern a small object. He would look at it intently and the smile on his radiant face would deepen. It was an oddly shaped jackknife, a present he had given to Oswald only a few short weeks before.

"To-morrow afternoon will be soon enough," he would say to himself again and again. "One neat little twist with this slender blade of the Doll's knife and I can slip the lock of my prison door. Then, with a gun and a black mask, I'll be the real villain in the most daring hold-up Boston ever witnessed."

Then Jimmy Hampton slept once more.

Meanwhile, Oswald Page also slept. It was

late when he and Tom reached their Brookline home. Both were tired, but both were very happy.

"With Jimmy's aid, I'll be the man of the house indeed," Oswald murmured as he rose from his prayers. "I knew Jimmy was true blue!"

Then he lay upon his soft pillow and slept peacefully, slept until the sun was high in the heavens on the eventful morning of July 16th.

CHAPTER X

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE GOLDEN LARK

"NO, sir, there are no seats left. Standing room only, sir."

"Can't I get a box seat?"

"No, indeed, sir. The boxes have been sold for the past week. If you wait around, you may be able to have a left-over. We reserve only until eight-thirty."

"That won't do. I'll not miss the curtain. Give me a rush seat."

"All right, sir, here you are, sir."

A steady stream of Boston's most fashionable theatre-goers was pouring into the Academy. It was the mid-summer event of the year, for the famous Raoul-Bartrand Troupe had a world-wide reputation, and was to be heard to-night for the first time in Boston.

A sinister smile played about the lips of the ticket-seller as he mentally calculated the enormous receipts. And when Mr. Goselip, pale and thin, supported by Mrs. Goselip and a male attendant, slowly entered, a look of hate played about the lips of the man in the little ticket office.

At just fourteen minutes past eight, he carefully removed the money from the till and went to the safe where two huge bags were kept. Quickly he placed all in a suitcase, watching

covertly that his act might not be observed. As he was about to reach for his coat, a soft tap came on the door of the ticket office and a voice whispered, "Open quickly. A message from Oakley."

The door was opened. A stranger entered.

"Quick!" the stranger whispered. "Step into the inner office! I must not be seen."

The unsuspecting ticket-seller turned his back upon the messenger and entered the small inner room. He no sooner did so than he was seized, gagged, and thrown noiselessly to the floor. It was done so quickly that not a groan, not a murmur escaped the man. Then Jimmy Hampton, for the robber was no other, returned to the office, blandly announced to a man patiently waiting at the ticket window that all seats had been sold, closed the window and slipped noiselessly into the narrow corridor that led to the rear of the stage. He chuckled as he heard the distant tinkle of the bell announcing the raising of the curtain.

"Done, Jimmy!" he said to himself. "May the Lark do his share as well!"

* * *

The interior of Boston's most famous theater presented a wonderful picture of animation and excitement. Despite the fact that every nook and corner was filled with expectant faces, a deep and solemn silence prevailed, broken only by the soft tones of the symphony orchestra, as it played the opening overture. For long weeks all Boston had been watching for this event. The Raoul-Bar-

trand Troupe had gained the applause of the world, and now at last critical Boston was to pass judgment.

As the overture proceeded, a noticeable impatience took possession of the crowd. And as they waited and watched and wondered, the eyes of every one of them was centered on the first row of the pit. There, immediately behind the orchestra, was huddled a strange row of figures. About twelve figures, seemingly children, enveloped in long, black cloaks, sat motionless and silent. The evening was a warm one, and yet each of the twelve was wrapped closely in the ample folds of his black robes. How mysterious and solemn they looked, with their dark disguises and bowed heads! Who were they? What did it mean?

Mr. Goselip, with Oswald's mother, sat in the box nearest the stage. He was very nervous tonight. Somehow, he feared that all was not as it should be, and the black-robed mutes directly before him, seemed to indicate some fearful foreboding. He held the hand of his wife tightly, and although he tried to appear at ease, his hand shook and his breath came in quick gasps.

With a flourish of horns and a beating of drums, the opening overture rose to its climax, filled the hall with sweet notes of harmony, died low and ceased. The curtain was about to rise. All eyes were strained to catch the first glimpse of fairyland that would surely introduce the famous troupe.

There was a long, silent pause. The little bell had tinkled, and yet the curtain did not rise. What was wrong?

Mr. Goselip could hardly restrain himself. Finally, the manager of the Academy came slowly on the stage before the curtain. His head was bowed. He feared to look into the faces before him and his voice shook when he began to speak. A convulsive quiver of excitement passed through the waiting black robes.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the message I bring is one that breathes of the tragic. We were to present to you to-night, the world's greatest offering, the Raoul-Bartrand Troupe. Words almost fail me when I am forced to announce that we must disappoint you—the members of the troupe, who were here until a few moments ago, and were supposed to have gone to their dressing rooms, are nowhere to be found. Further than this, the most daring robbery that Boston has ever witnessed has been enacted before our very eyes. A moment ago our ticket-seller was found gagged, bound and half killed, and every cent of the receipts for this evening's performance has been stolen! The honor of the Academy is at stake and the management wishes me to announce that all will be properly reimbursed in time, but for the present you are asked to leave the theater in an orderly and——"

"One moment, please!"

A boyish voice rang through the large hall. The foremost black robe arose, wound his mysterious

gown more tightly about him, stepped up beside the announcer on the stage, whispered to him what seemed to be the magic word, then turned toward the people. Such an unforeseen interruption, following so closely upon such a tragic announcement, held the vast crowd spellbound and silent. They actually began to think the whole scheme a cleverly enacted introduction to the evening's entertainment, and they glanced expectantly from the lonely figure on the stage to the still solemn black robes in the pit.

A deeper silence reigned now, for the new actor was about to speak:

"A foul and filthy plot, dear friends, has been formed to ruin one of your most respected citizens, and it has reached its culmination in the disappearance of the Raoul-Bartrand Troupe. However, the plot has been nipped in the bud, as it were, and before the evening is over, the perpetrators, from the dishonest ticket-seller of this theater to the manager of the Eastern Troupe, will languish behind prison bars.

"In the meantime, hearken to my magic announcement. You have noticed the mysterious black robes who so solemnly and stolidly have sat throughout this excitement, and of whose number I count myself. You have asked yourself and your neighbor concerning them, and the answers made you wonder all the more. They are the avengers of evil! They will introduce themselves to you in a moment, and will be under the leadership of one you know and love. Two years ago

all Boston bowed before a singer who gained the love and devotion of every one. He was but a child, yet, at his last appearance—ah, well you remember it! he saved the lives of scores in the famous Boston Theater fire. It is my privilege to announce to you the return this evening and this moment to the stage, of the sweetest bird that ever gained the love of our American people, the famous Golden Lark!"

With a deep bow, Tom Palmer, for the speaker was no other, hurried from the stage. Wild excitement reigned in the theater, and in the tumult, the twelve black robes threw off their somber garments and filed up onto the stage as the curtain rose upon a veritable fairyland. The boys were attired in wonderful costumes, and as they fell back somewhat to the rear, Oswald Page, "The Golden Lark," appeared, dressed in the same gorgeous costume he had worn two years before on the night of the tragic fire.

Yes, the people remembered "The Golden Lark." As they looked once more upon him, their applause was loud, long, and wild. They seemed immediately to forget the tragic announcements of the moment before or to think them a part of the entertainment.

Finally, silence was obtained, and the bird-like tones of "The Golden Lark," rose clear and sweet above the soft accompaniment of the boys. Fairyland was made real by fairies themselves, *fairies* with voices of angels, led on by "the *sweetest* voice that ever sang this side of heaven,"

as one man said. Spellbound, the audience drank in each seraphic note.

From the moment of the first dramatic announcement, Alexander Goselip lay back as if stunned. His face was cold and feverish, colorless, and flushed in turn. The final blow had come and he was a ruined man! It was not of himself he thought, but of the woman beside him and of the child he had learned to love. Mrs. Goselip forgot her own pain in anxiety for her husband.

At the mention, however, of "The Golden Lark," both husband and wife rose to their feet, wild with excitement, and stared with bulging eyes at the stage before them. Yes, it was Oswald Page, no other; their own beloved Lark! With one impulse, Mr. Goselip and his wife turned and fled through the door that led from their box to the rear of the stage. Just as they reached the wings of the stage, they came face to face with Jimmy Hampton, the missing chauffeur. He held a large suitcase and was guarded by two burly policemen.

Recognizing Mr. Goselip, one of the guardians of the law whispered, "We have the thief, sir, taken with the goods. That suitcase holds the receipts for this evening's entertainment. The villain didn't even try to escape."

A quiet smile played about Jimmy's face as he looked fearlessly into the accusing eyes of his employer.

"So this," quietly spoke Mr. Goselip, "is the way you repay Oswald Page for all he has done

for you. I could stand the blow myself, but to see that boy ruined by one he trusted and loved——"

"Stop, Mr. Goselip, that is enough! Rather than harm one hair of his head——"

Goselip interrupted. "Words are useless, sir. The evidence is too great. You are a thief, a robber, a murderer of an innocent and trustful soul!"

The man raised his hand solemnly to heaven and continued, "And may the curse of the innocent boy you have sought to ruin, fall——"

"Stop, Daddy Goselip, stop!" The shrill voice of Oswald Page could be heard far above the deafening applause that greeted the end of his song. He rushed quickly between his father and Jimmy.

"Stop, father, for Jimmy Hampton is true blue. He has saved your reputation and your fortune; he has risked his life for me; he has suffered pains of body and soul, has submitted to be called a thief and a robber, because he loves 'The Golden Lark!'

"Take him to your arms, father, as I take him to mine! Jimmy Hampton, I always believed in you in spite of everything and you were worthy of my love! But there! They are calling for another song! The Golden Lark obeys—to-night, at least!"

A moment later, the great audience of the Academy listened entranced to the sweet melody of their long-lost favorite. Little did they dream of the stirring events that introduced him to their

midst once more; little did they dream that they were privileged to enjoy the first and only performance of the reappearance of the Golden Lark.

* * *

The eventful day was over. Oakley and his accomplices were captured and sent to prison to await trial. As soon as he was apprehended, the dishonest broker confessed his frauds and explained that the silver mines on Gold Pot were worth a fortune.

The nervous reaction of the dramatic events in the Academy had worked a complete cure in Mr. Goselip, and now, as the morning sun poured its pleasant rays through the windows of the Brookline home, he and Oswald, along with Oswald's mother and the Calixtus boys, sat at breakfast. A smile played about the face of our little hero.

"It was a hard thing to do, Daddy Goselip." He smiled with love into his father's face. "But I knew the plot and I also knew that Jimmy was trying to save us. You left everything to me, you know, so I made up my mind to be the man of the house. Now we can all be happy again, can't we?"

"There is but one thing now to complete our happiness all around," laughed Tom Palmer, "and that is to have the 'Doll' once more at Calixtus."

All the boys present loudly voiced approval of this.

"If he goes to Calixtus, I go too!" spoke up Jimmy Hampton, who had just entered.

"You bet, Jimmy," cried Oswald. "We're not going to separate again. We all go back to dear old Calixtus together."

Dear reader, may you and I be at Calixtus when the Golden Lark returns.

THE END.